Interview with Mary Seymour Olmsted

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Women Ambassadors Series

AMBASSADOR MARY SEYMOUR OLMSTED

Interviewed by: Ann Miller Morin

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Q: Ambassador Olmsted, would you tell us a little about your family, their background and where they came from and so forth?

OLMSTED: My family is of English-Scottish extraction. My father comes from an old New England family, but he was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where his father had gone in order to get away from the rigors of a cold climate.

My mother's background was Scottish. She was born in Hastings, Minnesota, and her parents were born in Missouri. They moved up the Mississippi River from Missouri as children or young people. Her grandparents were born in Scotland and came to this country to avoid the service in the King's Army.

My parents met and married in northern Minnesota, where my father was an engineer with the M.A. Hannah Company in the mines of northern Minnesota. He was a graduate of the University of Illinois. My mother was teaching school there. She was a graduate of Northwestern University. Her specialty was in the field of speech, and she did a good deal

of what they used to all elocution. At that time she was teaching English and a few other subjects in the local high school.

Q: Very good. You got an early start in having a model in your mother, didn't you, as far as having your own career?

OLMSTED: Yes, I think that's true. She had very much wanted to go on the old Chautauqua [circuit]. Do you remember that?

Q: Yes, indeed.

OLMSTED: But the illness of her mother prevented her from doing that, but she always looked back on that as something she wanted very much to do.

Q: Principally, I suppose her basic job was that of homemaker, wasn't it?

OLMSTED: Yes, that's correct.

Q: How large a family did you have?

OLMSTED: Only my brother and myself.

Q: Was he older than you?

OLMSTED: Yes, my brother was two and a half years older.

Q: Were you brought up in any particular church? Was religious training a great part of your background?

OLMSTED: It was part of our background. My mother was an Episcopalian, my father a Presbyterian, but they agreed that the children would be brought up as Episcopalians, and so we were.

Q: And you went to church all the time, and Sunday school, that sort of thing?

OLMSTED: Yes, I went to Sunday school and to church.

Q: You mentioned your maternal grandmother. Did she live with you?

OLMSTED: Let me think. I think she did when I was very, very small, but I don't remember her.

Q: Did grandparents play much of a part in your life?

OLMSTED: Not a great deal. The last of my four grandparents died when I was five years old. Consequently, it's quite minimal.

Q: What about aunts and uncles, cousins?

OLMSTED: Not very much. My mother's sister and her family lived in Duluth, where I was born, and I knew them as a small child. But we moved away from Duluth when I was three years old and moved down to my father's old home in Chattanooga. Then when I was six, we moved to Florida, and that's where I grew up. Consequently, I saw cousins and aunts and uncles on occasional holidays.

Q: So it really was a nuclear family that you grew up in?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: How about your relationship with your brother? Did you fight the way most children do?

OLMSTED: Yes, yes.

Q: Did you try to emulate him?

OLMSTED: I don't know that I did. He was a sickly child, and I think I was jealous of the amount of attention he got.

Q: If he were sickly, you, I gather, had good health?

OLMSTED: I had excellent health.

Q: You probably didn't play with him very much, then, did you?

OLMSTED: Oh, yes, we played together.

Q: Quietly?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: What about the yard games and climbing trees and so forth, which many children do?

OLMSTED: We lived on the edge of the Indian River in Florida, and our childhood games were focused a little more on water than they would have been under other circumstances. We had boats, little boats, and things that children could play in, and our friends had boats. So we did a good deal of swimming and boating and that sort of thing.

Q: Were you very interested in sports as a young girl?

OLMSTED: Yes, I'd say fairly interested. Yes, I liked being active.

Q: But you weren't a tomboy?

OLMSTED: Oh, I think I was, perhaps, maybe up until the time I was ten. Then I started wearing glasses, and that seemed to inhibit my activities.

Q: But you weren't a “doll” girl.

OLMSTED: No, I was not.

Q: Did you have any serious childhood illnesses?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: What about your brother? Did he die at an early age?

OLMSTED: No, no, he's still living. He wasn't an invalid. It's not that at all. But when other people got colds, he had the flu. When other people got flu, he had pneumonia. It was that sort of thing.

Q: I see. A weakish constitution. And, of course, he was the boy.

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: In relation to your parents, would you say you were closer to one than to the other?

OLMSTED: I think I was closer to my mother than to my father.

Q: Was your father the strict prototype of a father?

OLMSTED: He was a little more—well, I'd say maybe a little austere.

Q: You didn't get too close to him?

OLMSTED: Not terribly, no.

Q: Did your mother teach you the things girls were supposed to know—cooking, sewing, keeping house?

OLMSTED: Not very much. Somewhat, but certainly I couldn't say that I learned a great deal of cooking and housekeeping from her.

Q: What was your perception of their wishes for you?

OLMSTED: I think my perception was that they expected me to have a career. I'm not sure I could have articulated it that way as a child. It was expected I would go to college and do something.

Q: It was a given?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Did either of them try to persuade you in any one particular field?

OLMSTED: No, no.

Q: What about yourself? Did you have any early ambitions, or did you just not know what you would do?

OLMSTED: I was very interested in science at one point, and at one time I thought I wanted to grow up and be a scientist.

Q: What kind?

OLMSTED: Oh, something in the natural sciences.

Q: I suppose maybe living in Florida might have had something to do with that. You have spoken of the water sports that you enjoyed. Did you have any particular hobbies—stamp collecting?

OLMSTED: Yes, I collected stamps. I read a good deal.

Q: Were you an early reader?

OLMSTED: Yes. I guess I was; I'm not sure. What other things do children do?

Q: We ruled out dolls, but you did like stamps and you did like reading. Did you belong to the Girl Scouts or the 4-H?

OLMSTED: I belonged to the Campfire Girls.

Q: For quite a while?

OLMSTED: I suppose for three or four years.

Q: You really enjoyed that?

OLMSTED: Yes. One of the teachers in high school was the leader of the Campfire Girls, and she was a teacher who was liked. She took us on expeditions, and we thought very well of her.

Q: When you were alone, what did you do? Did you play cards with yourself or did you—

OLMSTED: No, I read.

Q: Make up any plays with other children?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: When you were littler, did you ever play dress-up?

OLMSTED: I can't remember.

Q: Probably more of an outdoor child. Play library, maybe?

OLMSTED: In a place like Florida, where you can be outdoors so much of the year, I think one's childhood is a little different—There were no little girls in my neighborhood, and I played with three brothers who were about the ages of my brother and myself. We played

all the games kids play—roller skating. They had a long cement driveway. We used to go roller skating on that.

Q: Did they permit you to join in their games?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Good. No teasing?

OLMSTED: Oh, yes.

Q: What about schooling?

OLMSTED: School was easy for me when I was young. I grew up in a very small community in a rural area of Florida, and the school standards were certainly not high and the competition was not great, and I found school a breeze.

Q: Your brother, was he also a bright scholar?

OLMSTED: Yes, yes.

Q: Were there any particular teachers that you looked up to or wanted to follow?

OLMSTED: Yes. I wouldn't say I wanted to follow them. I don't believe I ever was interested in being a teacher, but my sixth grade teacher I liked very much.

Q: They were all women, were they not?

OLMSTED: Until I got into junior high school, yes.

Q: Was that the sort of system where you had a different teacher for each subject?

OLMSTED: Well, maybe one teacher for two subjects and another teacher for two others.

Q: So you began to branch out. Did you move to a bigger school when you were in the seventh and eighth grades?

OLMSTED: No. We were living in the same community.

Q: I didn't know if they bused children.

OLMSTED: They did bus children as it was a very scattered area. The population density was very low, and they had to have school buses. At first I took the school bus to the elementary school in Titusville, and then later to the junior-senior high school, which was about halfway between Titusville and the community where I lived, called Indian River City.

Q: Indian River would be near Melbourne?

OLMSTED: It's north of Melbourne.

Q: North of Melbourne, but on that coast. Did your mother and father seem to expect more of your brother than they did of you?

OLMSTED: I'm not sure I could answer that. Yes, I guess they did. I guess they did.

Q: But it was assumed that you would both go on?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: And you graduated from the local high school?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: What were your favorite subjects then? Science?

OLMSTED: Yes, and I liked history and I liked English.

Q: When it came time to go on to college, how did you decide which one you'd go to?

OLMSTED: My parents wanted me to go to New England to college. They thought that the New England schools were better, the private colleges there were of a better standard, and they also wanted me to have the experience of living in a different part of the country, and coming into contact with people who were different from our neighbors in rural Florida.

So I sent away to get various college catalogs. I had a cousin who was three years older, who had gone to Vassar and was in Vassar at the time I was deciding. She was interested in having me go there. I studied the catalogs. As I needed scholarship assistance that figured in, too, what different colleges would offer. My grandmother and my great-grandmother had both gone to Mt. Holyoke. Neither had graduated, but both had been students. That was in my father's family. I think that was of interest to me. Consequently, I decided on Mt. Holyoke.

Q: Partially because it was a women's school?

OLMSTED: Yes, but I think all the schools I applied for were women's schools. I applied to Mt. Holyoke, Vassar, Wellesley, and it seems to me there was one other, but I've forgotten.

Q: Were you only interested in going to girls' schools?

OLMSTED: I don't remember that I applied to any co-educational schools.

Q: That's interesting. Why do you think that was?

OLMSTED: Well, I think my parents encouraged me in doing it, thinking I would get a better education in a women's college than a co-educational school.

Q: You already had the New England connection, of course, through your father. You have said that the schooling that you had—that is to say not that you had, but that the Florida educational system wasn't as high.

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Did you have to have any special extra help or outside courses in order to get into Mt. Holyoke?

OLMSTED: No. I have heard it said that they added an extra ten or fifteen points to the scores of entering students from the South to reach a certain parity with the others. I don't know whether that's true or not, but I wouldn't be surprised. I took the Scholastic Aptitude Test.

Q: When you were in high school, did you participate in extracurricular activities?

OLMSTED: I was in the senior play, and I played basketball for a little while. I didn't really stick with basketball for very long.

Q: Public speaking?

OLMSTED: We didn't have public speaking. Oh, yes, I wrote a column for the local newspaper, which came out twice a week, on school activities.

Q: Was there a school newspaper?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: Were you particularly interested in being in an Ivy League school?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: I'm a little unclear. After you moved to Florida, your father was still working in his own field, was he?

OLMSTED: No. No. He left the mining business when we left Minnesota. In Tennessee, he was working as a building contractor, and then when we moved to Florida, he retired, but bought a couple of citrus groves and he managed them.

Q: I see. And did your mother continue with her elocution?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: Did you ever sense that she wanted to do more with her life?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: Did you ever feel she wanted to succeed through you?

OLMSTED: I would have said through my brother.

Q: What field did he choose?

OLMSTED: He went to Dartmouth, and then he went into business, in the sales end of business. He's been in one activity or another.

Q: Where does he live now?

OLMSTED: In Chattanooga, or Signal Mountain, which is a suburb of Chattanooga.

Q: Getting back to Mt. Holyoke, what did you major in?

OLMSTED: Economics.

Q: Wasn't that considered unusual for a girl?

OLMSTED: No, not at Mt. Holyoke.

Q: Did you have minors?

OLMSTED: Yes, I minored in English.

Q: With what particular objective did you major in economics?

OLMSTED: (Laughter) I don't think I had one in the beginning. It was a subject that I found interesting. I liked my teachers.

Q: I see. You picked for the professor, rather than for the subject?

OLMSTED: No, I wouldn't really say that, but if I had not liked the professors, I think I would probably not have gone into it. One doesn't give very much thought, I think, to the future in choosing a major.

Q: You graduated in 1941. So that was before the outbreak—

OLMSTED: Before we were in the war.

Q: Then you went to Columbia?

OLMSTED: Yes. But I was only a part-time student at Columbia. I was earning my living and taking night work at Columbia.

Q: What sort of living were you earning in New York?

OLMSTED: I got a job in a security analysis division of one of the big banks in New York, Central Hanover Bank and Trust Company, as it was then called. It's been merged and the name has been changed a couple of times since then. After I worked there for a couple of years, I worked at the National Bureau of Economic Research for a couple of years.

Q: In college, we haven't gone over the extracurricular activities there. Did you continue on with your newspaper reporting?

OLMSTED: Yes, I did that for a couple of years. I worked on the Mt. Holyoke News, I think it was called. I was in the Dramatic Club. I was the stage manager for Junior Show and I was in the Outing Club. Those, I think, were the principal activities. I had to earn money while I was there. I waited on tables my first year, and I lived in a cooperative dormitory my last three years. I had a job doing clerical work in the office to earn spending money. That rather restricted my time.

Q: I think you did an awful lot, considering that you did have those restrictions. Let's move on to Columbia. You were living in New York City?

OLMSTED: Yes, in the Village.

Q: That's quite a long way to go, isn't it, to Columbia.

OLMSTED: Yes, it is. Well, I was working downtown, so I was living about halfway. Well, roughly halfway.

Q: Did you share an apartment with another girl?

OLMSTED: Initially I did. Then she decided she would go back and live with her parents, so then I had the place by myself.

Q: During the war, Columbia was used by the Navy to train midshipmen. Was that very disruptive, having all those midshipmen all over the place?

OLMSTED: Not terribly. Campus life was not at all important to me at that time. I had a full-time job, and I was working very hard to keep my head above water. I've forgotten now what I took, one or perhaps two courses. I think only one course a semester. I can't

remember. That fully occupied me. The fact that there were midshipmen on the campus was just something that I saw and walked on.

Q: Did you go to Columbia because you were living in New York?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: So Columbia was secondary to New York. You had a job first, I presume. What did you study at Columbia?

OLMSTED: Economics. It was statistics, really.

Q: Did you participate in any sort of war work?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: You probably wouldn't have time, would you? Can you recall if there was any impact on your thinking because of the war, on your future activities and your philosophy?

OLMSTED: Not much that I was aware of at the time. Perhaps there was. Perhaps it did increase my interest in foreign affairs. It's so hard to nail all that down.

Q: You were not interested in becoming an officer yourself in the Army or the Navy?

OLMSTED: No. I had no desire for a military career.

Q: When was your first interest in the Foreign Service?

OLMSTED: Well, it came up quite by happenstance. I had decided that I was getting tired of New York, and I decided I would like to do something different. I had been at the National Bureau of Economic Research for a couple of years, and I was getting tired of my job there.

A friend of mine had gone down to Washington and had gotten a job with one of the wartime agencies, and I don't remember which one. She wrote glowing letters about how much she was enjoying Washington and so on. She suggested—or I may have; I don't remember—that I should go down there and look around. So I did so, and I stayed with her for several days and made the rounds of various places. She brought back for my use, before I arrived, a number of the Form 57s. You remember the old Form 57? That's what you filled out to get a government job. I filled one of them. The first one I filled out was not very neat and tidy. It was blotted, and I had crossed things out and so on.

She had told me where she had heard they were hiring people, and one of the places she said was the Department of State, because they were still taking people into the Foreign Service Auxiliary. So I took the form that was the least presentable down to the Department of State, because I felt they would not hire me. I thought I had no chance as a woman getting into the Department of State, but I thought the experience of having an interview in the government would be useful. So I took my badly blotted form down there and was interviewed for an assignment in the Foreign Service Auxiliary, and some weeks later, why, they wrote me a letter offering me a job, to my great amazement.

Q: Yes! So that is how you happened to go to Montreal?

OLMSTED: Yes. I was assigned as a junior economic analyst in the Foreign Service Auxiliary.

Q: How about your parents? Did they applaud this decision of yours?

OLMSTED: Not really. I think they were a little taken aback by it. They thought New York was entirely far enough away.

Q: Were you able to see your parents often at this time?

OLMSTED: I went home a couple of times a year.

Q: Of course, it was very difficult during the war to even get on trains.

So you were then a junior economic analyst in the Foreign Service Auxiliary. What does a junior economic analyst do?

OLMSTED: (Laughter) Whatever is needed in the economic section.

Q: Then you became an FSO (unclassified) in 1946.

OLMSTED: The Department said it was offering the Foreign Service examination in the fall of 1945. I think it was November of 1945. I believe that was the first post-war offering of the Foreign Service examination. They said anyone on the rolls could take it and so on. This is the same examination that was offered to military people. I took it in Montreal and passed it, and then I was told I would have to go down to Washington and take the oral, and I arranged to do that some months later. Of course, I took the examination in November and then it was a few months before they told me that I had passed, and then another few months before I went down there. So I believe it was in May that I took my oral examination.

Q: How long was the exam that you took? Was that the three-and-a-half-day one?

OLMSTED: It was cut down to a two-day exam at the time I took it.

Q: Part of it was a language qualification, wasn't it?

OLMSTED: I had an oral examination in Spanish. I can't remember now that there was a written examination in Spanish. There may have been, but I must say my mind is not clear on it.

Q: When you went down to Washington, can you remember who was on your Board? Are there any anecdotes you can remember from that?

OLMSTED: Francis Willis was one of the people who was on our board. And if I thought long enough, I would remember the man who was chairman of it. He was an ambassador, quite well along in years at the time.

I stayed with the same friend with whom I had stayed when I went down to get my original appointment, and I had a new dress and a new hat and a new hair-do for the occasion. The examination was rather short, shorter than I had really expected. It was in the late morning, and they said, “Go have lunch and come back at two o'clock,” for the results of it.

I came back, sat down at the desk of the man who had been the chairman of the board, and he looked at me, he looked down, and I thought, “Oh, dear. He's going to tell me that I failed it.” I was just feeling a wave of disappointment when he looked up again and said, “Miss Olmsted, I want to congratulate you. You're now a Foreign Service officer.” (Laughter) So I went out in a great wave of triumph.

Q: Of course! What sorts of things did they ask in those days?

OLMSTED: V-J Day had taken place several months earlier, and they asked me what kind of an economic program I would recommend for Japan following its defeat. It seems to me they asked me something on the Middle East, but I can't remember what it was. And some other questions. They asked me a couple of questions in Spanish. My Spanish was not very good, but it was fully as good as the person who was asking the questions. (Laughter) I got through that end of it all right.

Q: Had you any idea what sort of things they were going to ask you? Were you able to prepare for this at all?

OLMSTED: Not really. Someone told me I should read the newspapers carefully and keep up with current events and have some views on them.

Q: Was it perhaps more to see the way you comported yourself?

OLMSTED: I think so.

Q: Once you were in the Foreign Service, you went to Amsterdam. That is to say, once you were a Foreign Service Officer and not Auxiliary. You went to Amsterdam as a consular officer?

OLMSTED: No, I went there as an economic officer—commercial officer, I think the name was.

Q: Then you did the consular along with it?

OLMSTED: Yes. There was a rotational program which was established at the request of the four young officers who were in Amsterdam. Initially it was only the men who were rotated. I said I wanted to be rotated, too, and after a little delay, they agreed that I could be rotated.

Q: Were you the only woman?

OLMSTED: Yes. Another woman Foreign Service officer, whose name escapes me, had been at Amsterdam somewhat before. She was one of the very early Foreign Service officers. She had served at Amsterdam a long time ago and then had left the Foreign Service, then come back during the wartime program and had been there for, I think, a couple of years before I arrived there. I never met her.

Q: When you were before the examining board, did they ask you questions that seemed to have a sexual bias? In other words, did they say, "Do you plan on a career or are you just going to work a little bit, then get married?"

OLMSTED: Not as far as I can recall. Or they may have asked it in such an oblique way that it didn't make much of an impression on me.

Q: Sure. Why the difference between when you were an "unclassified" and when you became an 06? Were you on probation?

OLMSTED: No. "Unclassified" was the designation that was used prior to the implementation of the Foreign Service Act of 1946. It was an automatic switch.

Q: Of course. Back to '46. Then you went up to 05 very quickly, didn't you? You moved on then to Reykjavik [Iceland]. Was that your choice?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: But you were the political officer. You had already done some political reporting, had you?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: Not at all? When you were in Amsterdam, you were in two rotations?

OLMSTED: Three. First I was commercial officer, then I handled passports and American citizens' affairs, and then I became a visa officer.

Q: I see. How did you like political work?

OLMSTED: Very much. I got very interested in it.

Q: Did you think of wanting to specialize in that?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: You were there for two years, apparently.

OLMSTED: Two and a half.

Q: Then went to Vienna as an economic officer. Was that a disappointment?

OLMSTED: Yes. I would have preferred staying in the political function.

Q: But you were given no choice. Given your background, your very strong background in economics, it made sense for the Department, didn't it? But what about the language when you were in Reykjavik? What did you use?

OLMSTED: Used English, which is quite widely spoken. Icelandic is spoken only by the small population of Iceland. English was the diplomatic language. No question about that.

Q: Did you learn much Icelandic?

OLMSTED: Enough to make a few social remarks, greetings, thanks and so on.

Q: Was that with special lessons?

OLMSTED: I took lessons for a little while, yes.

Q: Before you went to Montreal, did you take French lessons?

OLMSTED: No. I think I'd had only a year or two in college and that was all.

Q: Before you were sent out to Montreal in the first place, did FSI [Foreign Service Institute] give you any sort of courses?

OLMSTED: When I was first hired as a junior economic analyst, I was sent to the old Foreign Service training school, and we had a six-weeks' course there which was rather general in nature, as there were people going into different kinds of work. Then when I became a Foreign Service officer, they did not bring me back for additional training.

Q: It was all pretty rudimentary, wasn't it?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: What sort of things did you learn about in that six weeks?

OLMSTED: (Laughter) Well, we had lectures from various people in the Department, and I can't say I remember now very much of what I did learn.

Q: Where was the old training school?

OLMSTED: It was at the Lothrop mansion on Du Pont Circle.

Q: The cone system, so called, didn't come in until much later, but were you effectively in a cone when you went to Vienna?

OLMSTED: Yes. It seems to me the cone system was being put into effect in the 1950s, and perhaps even early '50s. I can remember saying, at least in the mid-'50s to Personnel, that I would like to be assigned to political work, and they said, “Oh, but you're in the economic cone.”

Q: There was no way you could get out of it if you wanted the other?

OLMSTED: Well, they made it seem impossible. Let's put it that way.

Q: How did you happen to be sent to Fletcher?

OLMSTED: I had applied for Russian language and area training when I was in Reykjavik. It was decided in the Department that I would not get the Russian language and area training, because at that time they were not assigning women FSOs to Moscow. Therefore, they weren't going to train them in Russian.

Q: Why weren't they assigning them?

OLMSTED: You know the old prejudices. So instead, they assigned me for political training at Fletcher [School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University].

Q: Even though you were an economist. It seems a bit confused.

OLMSTED: I thought so at the time.

Q: Were you pleased with this assignment?

OLMSTED: Yes. Yes.

Q: With the old theory that if you can get them to invest in you. (Laughter)

OLMSTED: Yes, yes.

Q: Of course, we have skipped right over all the RIF [reduction in force] period, because that didn't affect you. That was in the early 1950s.

OLMSTED: I was in Vienna at the time, and it did not affect me directly, but indirectly it did, because there were a great many temporary appointees, people who had been taken over from the military at the Embassy, which was combined. It was the Office of the High Commissioner to Austria, as well as the Embassy. It was USCOA/Embassy, or Embassy/USCOA. I've forgotten now. RIF was in the air, and it impacted on the work that I was doing as I was picking up work that other people had done but were being RIFed, that sort of thing. Morale was terrible.

Q: Were you afraid that perhaps it might get down as far as a permanent worker?

OLMSTED: I didn't worry about it.

Q: You were an FSO. It was the FSSes that were under the ax. You were there at the time of all the troubles with Joe [Joseph R.] McCarthy. You were in Vienna at that time.

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Did Schine and Cohn go to Vienna? They swept through London and Paris. [David Schine and Roy Cohn were investigators for Sen. McCarthy who checked embassies in Europe looking for Communists]

OLMSTED: It seems to me they did, but I didn't have anything to do with their visit. I can't even be sure that they did, in fact.

Q: Did that whole era have much of an impact on you?

OLMSTED: When I was in Vienna, I was sent back to Washington to take the mid-career officers' course. I had come back for home leave, and they kept me on to take the mid-career officers' course. That's where I got a good dose of McCarthyism and its impact on the Department. The man who was running the course was fired because they didn't like some of his personal life.

Q: It was terrible, wasn't it?

OLMSTED: Yes, and it was certainly very much discussed at the time.

Q: Yes. Do you agree with certain other Foreign Service officers that it had a devastating effect on the Department, that the Department never really has recovered from it?

OLMSTED: I think that's probably true.

Q: You do agree with that? It never got over it?

OLMSTED: Well, it wasn't that so much as the feeling you want to play it safe. Whatever it was, you want to play it safe.

Q: I see what you mean. You were at Fletcher for one year. Is that a degree situation?

OLMSTED: I didn't take the degree.

Q: Then you came back to be an intelligence research specialist. That would be in INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research]?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: That's considered political work, isn't it?

OLMSTED: Not what I was doing.

Q: That lasted for a year?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Did you enjoy it?

OLMSTED: No. When I was in Vienna, for the first year I was there, I was doing commercial work. Actually, what I was spending most of my time doing was bringing up to date things that had been neglected because of the pressures resulting from the wartime status of Vienna. I was there during the four-power occupation, during the time of a great deal of stress. A lot of work had been neglected, things that were routinely sent out from the Department to be done. So I was in the economic section, and I was given one backlog after another to clean out, and it was pretty dull. I did it for a while, and I made it clear I was getting pretty tired of it. So they were going to set up a new unit which was to deal with the problems of the economic relations between Austria and the Soviet bloc. They said I could be assigned to that new unit.

When I came back from this mid-career course, that's where I was assigned, and I had a very interesting job, which I enjoyed very much. However, I felt it had run its course, and when I was in INR, they wanted me to continue in that line of work. East-West trade is a broad term for it, but it was wearing thin at that time. I felt that people were scratching

around to hold on, that there had been some empire building. People were trying to maintain their little empires. And I'd had enough of it, and so I wanted to get out.

Q: You then were detached to the Department of Commerce?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: That was at your choice?

OLMSTED: No. I had asked to go to the Department of Labor, and for reasons known only to the personnel system, I was put in the Department of Commerce, which came as very much of a surprise to me.

Q: What did you do over at Commerce?

OLMSTED: Writing for the Foreign Commerce Weekly and answering correspondence and so on. I was working on Germany and Austria.

Q: I'm getting the feeling here that you were sort of shunted around at this time.

OLMSTED: Yes, I was.

Q: Very definitely. Do you think it was because you were a woman?

OLMSTED: Oh, that probably was one of the reasons.

Q: One of the reasons. You did not have a mentor?

OLMSTED: I did not.

Q: That is true? You did not? Do you think it's essential to have a mentor? You mentioned the empire building in the Department. Do you think it's essential to have a mentor to help you get ahead and rise?

OLMSTED: Well, I'm sure it helps.

Q: Not necessarily essential?

OLMSTED: No, I wouldn't say necessarily essential. I don't think I've ever had a mentor, and I survived.

Q: Well, yes, of course you did, and very well, too. But that's an awful lot of what sounds like very dull work just to keep afloat.

OLMSTED: It was a dull period for me.

Q: At that time, I suppose you couldn't envision ever becoming an ambassador.

OLMSTED: Well, I had never spent very much time thinking about becoming an ambassador.

Q: There are certain young FSOs who say, "I'm going to be an ambassador in X number of years." But that never was—

OLMSTED: No, no.

Q: The next entry is in June of '58, and it just says "international economics."

OLMSTED: I came back to the Department and I was assigned to the Bureau of East Asian Affairs as an international economist, I guess they called me, in the Office of Southwest Pacific Affairs. I was assigned specifically to working on Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs.

Q: I see. So that was your first entry into Asia?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: I see then you got a promotion. That is slow, isn't it?

OLMSTED: Yes. Well, that was the period when they divided the old Class 4.

Q: Right. So it isn't slow, because you didn't slide back to Class 5. [In 1956, changes were made in the classification of Foreign Service officers. Additional classes were added and class four was divided into class four and five. Olmsted was in the top half of four and so retained that grade level.] Now things seem to be coming together here. You moved on to New Delhi and you had been working that part of the world in economics. Did you have a feeling things were coming together at that time?

OLMSTED: When I was at the Fletcher School, I became very interested in the Third World for the first time, so I was very pleased when I was assigned to work on Indonesian Affairs. I worked very hard in that job.

Q: I'll bet you did.

OLMSTED: And I liked it very much. When they offered me New Delhi, I accepted with alacrity, although I knew very little about India. I had to take a step back. I'd just been promoted to Class 3, but the best they could offer me was a Class 4 slot.

Q: A question of taking what was available. How did that job work out? Did you enjoy yourself there?

OLMSTED: Yes, I did. The embassy had quite a large economic section in New Delhi, and the new person usually gets the dregs, and I did. But I caught on to the fact that in a large and very complicated and very different economy like India's, you can't start out at the top. You've got to learn. So I took advantage of the situation and, again, I cleaned up some backlogs of work, but I managed to keep moving so that I worked in one area of the economy and another and another, and after a while I became the person others were

turning to, because I had the broadest view of things.Living in India is exasperating, it's frustrating, it's depressing, but it's always fascinating.

Q: So much poverty.

OLMSTED: Yes. Well, it's not the poverty that's fascinating, that's the depressing part. But I did a great deal of traveling and saw a lot of India, managed to get away from the New Delhi cocktail circuit fairly often. I enjoyed it very much, a very, very enriching experience.

Q: You were in New Delhi, then, for at least four years?

OLMSTED: Four and a half years.

[July 3, 1985 interview begins]

Q: Ambassador Olmsted, we have talked about your being in India four and a half years, but we haven't touched on the private side of things. Where did you live when you were in India? Were there embassy staff apartments?

OLMSTED: I was in embassy housing. It was an old, large house that had been built originally for someone on the Viceroy's staff. It was in the Mogul fashion, built around a courtyard and there were two little houses out from the main house. They were for the two aides-de-camp of whoever was on the Viceroy staff.

At one time, the United States High Commissioner and, I believe, the ambassador had lived there in the fairly early days, but then another house was chosen for the ambassador's residence, and this was cut up into apartments. I had one of the two little houses that extended out from the main building, and a very large garden. I had my own household staff. I had a cook bearer and a sweeper and a part-time laundryman and a part-time gardener.

Q: Did you find those yourself, those people? You hired them yourself, or did you inherit them?

OLMSTED: I hired them myself.

Q: What language did you use with them?

OLMSTED: I used English mainly. My bearer spoke enough English so he could serve as interpreter.

Q: Were there any other women officers there? I know you and Carol Laise overlapped a little bit. But were there any others?

OLMSTED: Yes, Carol Laise was there for the first several months that I was there. Let me see. The commercial attach#, Virginia Torreson, came somewhat later. There were some women officers in USIA. I'm not sure I can remember their names now. The personnel officer was a woman, and it seems to me there may have been one or two others.

Q: So you weren't feeling totally on your own, I suppose. Overseas at times, I would be very homesick. But of course, I had a family around me and things to keep me busy. What does one do when one is by oneself?

OLMSTED: I worked quite long hours in New Delhi, and there was sort of a built-in social life, plus the fact I did a lot of travel, as I mentioned before. In addition to that, I've always liked gardening, and I worked in my garden, supervising the maliwallah and doing the things that he never bothered to do. I had some friends in the local community and among the diplomatic corps, as well.

Q: Did you find that more of your free time was spent with non-embassy people, or with embassy people?

OLMSTED: Probably with embassy people.

Q: What sort of things did you do for recreation to keep yourself fit? It's such a hot climate.

OLMSTED: Well, I'm not terribly interested in sports, and I did not engage very much in sports, although I had a bicycle and I did some bicycling around. I like to walk, and I did a fair amount of walking. I was interested in the local culture. There was always sightseeing, always temples and old buildings of one sort or another to look at.

Q: Was it the custom, as it was with the British, to go up in the hills when it got really hot?

OLMSTED: Well, some people did, but the embassy usually saw fit to let the married people go up with their families and the single people usually stayed in New Delhi.

Q: You know, it seems to me you single people have a pretty rough deal, really. It's true. You get the odd weekend duties and that sort of thing.

OLMSTED: Yes, that's true.

Q: I think definitely you do. When you had finished your assignment in New Delhi, did you feel you had grown a lot in your career from your years there?

OLMSTED: Yes, I did. I felt that was something of a crossroads for me.

Q: Was that because of the fact that you were much more knowledgeable about another culture, or because of the economic reporting you did? Can you pinpoint it?

OLMSTED: I think I probably did more in the way of original reporting, more of the analytic reporting there. In addition to that, for the first time I moved into a semi-supervisory job. I became the deputy to the economic counselor, and it was a fairly large economic section. I did a good deal of the liaison work with AID, although that was a rather informal

arrangement. Consequently, I had more responsibility and I moved into areas I had not been in before.

Q: Yes. Is that why you were detached to the Senior Seminar, do you think, because of the quality of your work there?

OLMSTED: I don't know. One never knows about these things.

Q: It seems to me, from looking back and looking at friends and so forth, that people who were picked for the Senior Seminar were people who had been sort of selected. At that time, did you think you would become an ambassador?

OLMSTED: I very much doubt that I gave it any thought at all. (Chuckles)

Q: Because the men do.

OLMSTED: Yes, the men do, but I don't think I ever gave very much thought to it.

Q: So you just went into the Senior Seminar. What was your reaction to that? Did you think it was worthwhile?

OLMSTED: Yes, I thought it was an extremely interesting course. I thought that I needed it very much in re-acquainting myself with what was going on in the United States. I felt that I had been quite cut off. I was quite absorbed in what was going on in India, and although we did get the Paris edition of the Herald Tribune, it was always several days late and it wasn't really as meaningful as the Washington Post would have been.

Q: Exactly. Exactly. This was in 1965. So when you came back, of course, you must have found yourself sort of tossed into this alien culture, where everybody was marching for civil rights.

OLMSTED: Yes, it was. Shortly after the seminar opened, the riots and of Watts took place, and I remember that as being a real shocker to me.

Q: Where did you go for your trip [for the Senior Seminar]?

OLMSTED: I made an round-the-world trip, and I went back to the subcontinent. I wrote a paper on Nepal, which was not as far away from India as I would have liked to have gotten. What I wanted to do was write on outer space, but that was vetoed by the coordinator of the Senior Seminar, who thought that space had become too romantic and wasn't really a serious matter.

Q: Quite relevant, I would have thought. You do select your own? You think up your own topics?

OLMSTED: Yes, you think it up, but it has to be approved, or at least that was the system when I was there.

Q: Shortly after you returned, within a few months, you were then promoted to an 02, which is now called [officer] counselor, which then put you in the really senior category.

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Then you were assigned as a supervisory economic officer, is that correct?

OLMSTED: I was the senior economic officer for India, Nepal, and Ceylon. This was the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, and the country director system had been established, or was established, I think, just after I went into that job, whereas previously the responsibilities had been quite regional. That is, South Asia was under one group. That group was broken up into two pieces and one person became a country director for India, Nepal, Ceylon, and I was the senior economic officer in that office.

Q: I see. By this time, you really were well locked into economics, weren't you?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: That you continued for three years. Could you describe what your duties were?

OLMSTED: The first year I was there, my duties were mainly connected with food and PL 480 matters. [Public Law 480 provided that surpluses of U.S. agricultural products could given as a form of foreign assistance.] The year that I was in the Senior Seminar, India had undergone a serious drought and threat of famine. The following year, the year that I went into this work, there was a second year of drought and a second year of famine. My responsibilities should have been fairly broad, but I had to focus very much on the question of getting PL 480 supplies, mainly grains, to India.

Q: Does the senior economic officer review the work from the field, the reports that are sent back?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Do you have any input into who is assigned to those slots?

OLMSTED: Very little.

Q: It's mostly through the director general's office?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Then you were detached to the Office of Economic Opportunity [OEO]. What was that position?

OLMSTED: I went into the planning and research area of the Office of Economic Opportunity. It was a very considerable change of pace for me. My feelings about it were

somewhat mixed. In some ways I was glad to have the opportunity to come a little closer to what was going on in the United States. I did feel a concern for the poor and what could be done in the way of economic development in the United States, just as I had been in countries abroad. I was glad to have the experience of working with an entirely different group of people who came from different backgrounds, different aspirations, different interests, different everything, although they, too, were Americans.

I thought there was a certain lack of practicality. I thought there was a certain lack of knowing exactly how to approach the problems. I could see that the intentions were very good, but in many instances I thought that what was being done was not really accomplishing very much.

Q: Who was the chief of that office at that time—the director?

OLMSTED: Donald Rumsfeld.

Q: What specifically were your duties?

OLMSTED: I was doing research and policy recommendations.

Q: Did you feel you had been shunted aside by getting that assignment?

OLMSTED: Somewhat. I had looked for another assignment in the Department, and there was nothing available that I found very interesting. Therefore, I thought, “I'll do something different.”

Q: Sure. Sure. So you stayed there for more than a year.

OLMSTED: It was more than a year. I don't remember.

Q: November '69 to about August '71, according to your record in the Biographical Register.

OLMSTED: No, it wasn't August '71; it was early '71 that I came back to the Department.

Q: I see. And in that time you were promoted to FSO 1, which is very good, because that's only five years. That's very good, isn't it, from 2 to 1? So by that time you must have thought you really were going to go places, didn't you? Or you still didn't think about it?

OLMSTED: Well, I didn't think very much about it. I must say I had not really expected that promotion from 2 to 1. I was pleased, but I was very surprised.

Q: Was that, do you think, because of the work you'd done in India?

OLMSTED: No, I don't, particularly. Of course, they review your whole record. It is hard to get a good efficiency rating, an officer's performance rating, from an outside agency. The Department habitually sends out an inspector to write a rather long detailed inspector's report to supplement what the other agency may have written. I had, during the time I was in OEO, become interested in the women's movement in the Department of State, and had become very active in it, even though I wasn't there. The inspector who was assigned to write my performance rating was very much of a feminist, a woman inspector named Gladys Rogers, who was very interested in what I was doing. I think that a very strong report that she wrote on me had a lot to do with it.

Q: The next job you had, you went back to the Department, and you were in personnel management?

OLMSTED: First I went back to the Board of Examiners for the Foreign Service. I was there over complement. That's probably why it doesn't show in my record. I sat on one of the examining panels as an economic officer and I was particularly interviewing economic officers who were applying for the Foreign Service.

Q: Is that about an eight-week or ten-week panel?

OLMSTED: At the time I was there, I think they were running all year 'round, because we were also interviewing people for transfer from staff to FSO categories.

Q: Then you got the Christian Herter Award in 1972. What was that for, ambassador?

OLMSTED: That was for my work with the women of the Department.

Q: Could you tell us a little bit more about that?

OLMSTED: When I was in OEO, I had a telephone call one weekend from someone whom I had known very slightly, a woman by the name of Jean Joyce, who was in the Bureau of Cultural and Educational Affairs. She said to me that a group of women in the Department were becoming concerned over the fact that there was great activity going on in the formulation of new policies under the Macomber Study, “Diplomacy for the Seventies,” and women were concerned that they were being left out, that no consideration was being given to the role that women might play. She said that a group of them were getting together for brown-bag lunches to talk about it. She asked me if I'd like to join them. I said, “Yes, I would.”

So I packed a brown-bag lunch and went over, and that was the beginning. There was only a small handful of us, but as we continued and talked, we became larger and began formulating what we were going to do. We decided we had to make a package proposal to someone, probably Mr. Macomber, who was then the Deputy Under Secretary for Management, about what we thought he should do and what we thought the Department should do.

We spent several weekends drawing together the facts and writing out our proposals and recommendations and so on. Many of the meetings were held here in this apartment. Over a period of time, I became the chairman of this group, which was then called the Ad Hoc

Committee to Improve the Status of Women in the Foreign Affairs Agencies. That group increased in size and began developing new ideas.

We did call on Mr. Macomber. We did so on the 26th of August, which was Women's Suffrage Day, of course, and presented him with a package of proposals, some of which he accepted on the spot, and others he said he thought would require further study. That encouraged us tremendously.

One of the things we persuaded him to do was to hold an open meeting for women in the Department of State and the other agencies, and it was a meeting that took several hours. It was held in one of the big conference rooms. This proved very successful in drawing out women who had previously stayed on the sidelines. Some of the things that people stood up on the floor and said, things that were debated, made the Department realize that they had got to get moving on the things that women were talking about.

The Department had been required by executive order—and I can't remember the number of it now—to take certain steps regarding women employees. One of the parts of that package was the establishment of a federal women's program with some woman at the head of it. The Department had not bothered to do that until we became active, and then suddenly it did appoint someone for that job. There was some debate among us, did we need to continue now that there was a women's coordinator? We decided, yes, we did need to continue, because a little pressure from the outside always helps. So we formalized our status to become the Women's Action Organization, State, AID, USIA, and I became the first president.

Q: How long did you serve as president?

OLMSTED: I think it was a little more than a year. I don't remember exactly. I think I became president around the end of—my memory is slipping. Let's see. I went to OEO in 1969, didn't I?

Q: Yes.

OLMSTED: I was there in '70. I think it was around the beginning of '71 that I became the first president. Then I was taken into the Office of Personnel, first, as I mentioned before, on the Board of Examiners, and then I became Deputy Director of Personnel for Policy Position, Classification—and I've forgotten the other things. This was on the technical side, rather than on the assignment side. After I went into that job, which turned out to be a very tough job, I was having less and less time for the Women's Action Organization.

Q: Do you think it's because of your work on the Women's Action Committee that you were placed in personnel?

OLMSTED: Yes, I do.

Q: So you see all that action did have results.

OLMSTED: Yes, yes. Many women felt that they would hurt their careers by going into an organization such as the Women's Action Organization. I found that was not true.

Q: How many women did you have in this? What proportion of the women who worked for the State Department and AID and USIA did join the group?

OLMSTED: I'm not sure I can answer that. We started out with a very small group, which gradually grew. I think we got up to nearly 1,000, our largest.

Q: Does that still go on today?

OLMSTED: Yes. It's not very active now, but it does exist.

Q: What exactly is the Christian Herter Award for?

OLMSTED: The Herter Award was for “extraordinary contributions to the practice of diplomacy, exemplifying intellectual courage and a zeal for creative accomplishment.”

Q: Very good. Is that given annually?

OLMSTED: Yes, and $1,000 goes along with it.

Q: That's nice. Did you treat yourself to a good vacation? (Laughter) You must have been very, very busy with all of that. Did you enjoy personnel work?

OLMSTED: Yes, it was quite interesting. It was a new field for me, but I found there were many aspects of it that I thought were indeed well worth the assignment.

Q: You certainly get to know who everybody is, don't you?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Several people told me it's been very helpful to them to get an overview, so to speak.

OLMSTED: Yes, yes. I went in with the group that was put into personnel shortly after the suicide of Charles Thomas. It was a very tense period. There was a great deal of pressure brought to bear on us. [Foreign Service Officer Charles W. Thomas committed suicide allegedly because of despondency after being dropped from the service. The Foreign Service term for involuntary retirement is “selection-out.”]

Q: This was because of the selection-out process, wasn't it?

OLMSTED: Yes. There were a lot of controversies. There were a lot of protests and complaints from people all over the Department, and it was not an easy time for any of us.

Q: But didn't you find that the '70s were a very difficult time, just in general, for the whole country, with the Vietnam War?

OLMSTED: Yes, I think that's true.

Q: It affected people's spirits. Were you active in the Vietnam protests?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: You were active in the women's issues. Then you became Deputy Director General of the Foreign Service, is that correct? Or Acting?

OLMSTED: Acting Deputy Director General, yes. There was a gap in the assignment of the director. One director general had left, and there was a gap in the assignment before a new one came on board. During that time, I was pushed up to becoming the Acting Deputy Director General.

Q: That's an awful lot of responsibility, I would think. Now you went out to Port Moresby. That was in June of '74?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: As principal officer. So in other words, you were made Consul General. Sworn in and so forth.

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: At that time, did you know that was going to become an Embassy?

OLMSTED: It seemed quite likely. Papua New Guinea, in the beginning, was obviously on the road to independence, and no one knew exactly when it would take place. But it seemed likely it would be within a year or so.

Q: Were you given any promises that you would have the slot?

OLMSTED: No. I didn't ask for them.

Q: Well, I'm sure you didn't ask for it.

OLMSTED: Well, people do negotiate sometimes.

Q: Yes, I know, but I can't imagine you doing it.

OLMSTED: I knew enough about the way personnel matters operate. The person who makes the commitments is usually someplace else by the time you want to call in your commitment.

Q: I'd love to hear more about the post. How many people were there?

OLMSTED: I opened the post. The Department sent in an advance team consisting of the young man who was to become our administrative officer and another young man who was sent out from the Department. They looked around to try to locate both housing and office space for us. Then my secretary went out a few days before I did. When I arrived, we had a staff of two people, which was the administrative officer and my secretary, and we moved into some rather shabby quarters over a lunch counter and a bookstore. There was no furniture in our quarters. We had ordered office furniture from Australia, but obviously it wouldn't get there for a couple of months. So we borrowed three battered desks and five chairs from the people we were renting the space from. These were straight chairs, not swivel chairs. As I say, these offices were a bit grubby. They were carpeted with large squares of blue and bluish-green cheap carpeting, and curtains were orange and white. The offices were broken down into little rabbit warrens. There were just a whole passel of these little rabbit warrens.

Q: Typical embassy. (Laughter)

OLMSTED: Yes. The floors creaked when we walked across them. We took out one of the walls to make a slightly larger office for me. We did little shopping locally. Things were expensive, and there wasn't very much variety. One day when we had three visitors and all of our staff of three were there, one person had to stand because we only had five chairs. So I told the administrative officer, “For goodness sakes, go out and buy a few chairs locally and we can use them somehow,” and we did. We also bought a large heavy table to put out Telex on, got the Telex installed, and that linked us up first with Australia and then later with Washington. We felt a little bit more in touch with things.

Then one day our shipment from Tokyo arrived. When a new post is opened, they always ask one of the large embassies in the area to make up a shipment of things that a new post will need and send them down. Well, obviously Tokyo cleaned out its attic when it made its shipment for us. This great big lift van arrived and was opened up, and the things were put in boxes in the reception room. We opened them one by one, and the stationery, envelopes, and consular forms, and seals and rubber stamps and all kinds of things that we needed, and there were paper clips. We couldn't get any paper clips locally. Running an office without paper clips is a bit of a challenge. They also sent our flags. They sent one flag that was nineteen feet long, and we had to open it up through the doors of three offices to see what size it was. I'm sure it was the largest flag in all of Papua New Guinea. We found exactly one use for it all the time that I was there.

Q: Was that for the Fourth of July?

OLMSTED: Yes. Yes, we strung it up on the Bicentennial Fourth of July.

So we were busy sorting those things out and making acquaintances around town. I knew it was important for me to get out and make calls, which I did, and become acquainted and let people know that the Americans were here and in business. It was quite clear we could not start operating our consular office for some time, because we just weren't set up for it.

When people came in to ask for consular services, we just had to tell them, “Come back maybe in October and we'll be able to help you then.”

So little by little, we did get established. Our shipment of office furniture arrived from Australia after a few months, and we had swivel chairs and real desks and desk lamps and all sorts of things that made us feel that we were coming up in the world. So you can see there are a series of steps that we took, one by one.

Q: Yes. You got the entire experience.

OLMSTED: Yes, and it wasn't until the end of the year that we really felt that we were fully operational. By that time, I think we were. Other personnel arrived. The political officer came, to be followed a few months later by the economic officer, who was also to do the consular work, and then the second of our two secretaries arrived. That was the group that manned the ship until after independence.

Q: At that time it was Papua New Guinea, and not the Solomon Islands, is that correct?

OLMSTED: I was assigned to Papua New Guinea. The Solomon Islands is a different political entity. It was under the British. I was told I would be responsible for handling whatever came up in connection with the Solomon Islands, and I should go over there from time to time, and which I did.

Q: Is it very far away?

OLMSTED: The small plane that connects them is nearly a four-hour flight. That is, from Port Moresby.

Q: Where did you live?

OLMSTED: I lived in Port Moresby, on the side of a hill overlooking the Coral Sea, an absolutely spectacular view of the curving coastline and the little islands dotting the harbor.

From my patio I could look 180 degrees around the horizon. Below me at the left, there was a fishing village on stilts built out over the water. To my right there was the curve of Paga Hill.

I was in a very modernistic house which was built by a Greek Cypriot who, according to the story, had arrived at Papua New Guinea practically penniless and was a soda-jerk at one of the downtown department stores initially. Being an educated man and, I think, quite clever and quite determined, he eventually got into more lucrative work and did quite well for himself financially. He built this as a bachelor's pad. You could see that a bachelor had built it, from many of its shortcomings. But it was an interesting house. The ceiling was seventeen feet high in the living room on one side sloping down to about four feet on the other side. There were five walls to the living room, three of which were glass, which gave a magnificent view of the Coral Sea and the coastline.

Q: Who kept the house for you?

OLMSTED: I hired a house boy named Kisini, who stayed with me all the time I was there. He had only a little training. I talked to some Australians about servants. Lady Cleveland was one who warned me that you can do worse with having someone who is trained in a way you don't like than in hiring someone with limited training whom you can train the way you do like. So I took the latter choice. This young man, I'm sure, was still in his teens when he first came to me, and spoke very little English. I had an Australian friend who had been a rubber plantation owner in Papua New Guinea for many, many years before he retired, and he had had a plantation in the area where my house boy came from, and he spoke the language. When I ran into real problems, I'd telephone him and he would play interpreter over the telephone for whatever it was that I wanted to get across. (Laughter)

Q: Did he cook for you?

OLMSTED: Yes. It was rather simple cooking, but I showed him some additional things.

Q: Did you buy everything on the local market, or did you import?

OLMSTED: We bought everything on the local market. There were a couple of Australian supermarkets there. In Port Moresby, they have supermarkets as adjuncts to department stores. There are two of those which had really a surprising variety of things. I could buy Sara Lee frozen goods made in Australia there, and quite a variety. Then I'd go to the local market for the local fresh produce.

Q: So you didn't import shipments of food for yourself from any other place?

OLMSTED: No. We could have, but it always seemed like more trouble than it was worth.

Q: Could you get things like ham?

OLMSTED: Yes. I think it was mainly canned ham that we got, but there was local beef available, and there was a German delicatessen which had some quite nice things.

Q: How did the host country react to having a woman consul general and then ambassador?

OLMSTED: Papua New Guineans are very conservative people. They don't jump to conclusions. They don't go off on rash tangents. They sit down and think things over very carefully. I'm using “conservative” not in the political sense, but in the real meaning of the word. So when I arrived, they were a little taken aback, but they thought it over very carefully and wanted to see what kind of a person I was and how I fitted in. Then after I had been there for some time, Washington appointed Ann Armstrong as ambassador to London. When the Papua New Guineans learned that London had an American ambassador who was a woman and they did, too, they rather felt that put them in the class with London.

Q: Isn't that charming.

OLMSTED: That was pretty nice.

Q: Yes, that's charming.

Tell me what happens when there is independence and then our government decides it's going to be an embassy, not a ministry or whatever. How do they technically do that? How do you get sworn in, for example?

OLMSTED: Let me answer your first question first. I don't believe there's a single legation now. It's almost automatic that if a country becomes independent, the mission that we will have there will be an embassy. There is no question about that, as far as I am aware.

On the day of independence, we had a little ceremony elevating the Consulate General to the status of embassy, and we unveiled our plaque which read “Embassy of the United States” in place of the one that said “Consulate General of the United States.” I automatically became the charg# d'affaires. I had hoped, of course, that I would become the ambassador, and I had decided I would not stay on as DCM if they appointed somebody else. I didn't know what was going on back in Washington. Our communications weren't all that good; nobody had visited recently to bring us up to date on things back there.

So I just sat back and waited to see what would happen. I knew I would be very disappointed, because I liked Papua New Guinea and I wanted to stay on. I felt I could handle the job, but I also know that there's many a slip when it comes to ambassadorial appointments.

Q: When was this, exactly?

OLMSTED: Well, independence was the sixteenth of September 1975, and that's when the post became an embassy. Then I think it was sometime in late October that I got the cable saying that President [Gerald] Ford wanted to appoint me as ambassador, and

was this agreeable with me. (Laughter) I sent back a very quick cable saying, “Yes, I'd be delighted.” Then my name was eventually sent up to the Senate, and I was confirmed in absentia. I did not go back for hearings.

We had a little ceremony in my office, at which I was sworn in. I just had my office staff and I invited a couple of people from the foreign office for it. We drank champagne afterwards.

Q: Who did the swearing in?

OLMSTED: My consular officer.

Q: Did you use a Bible?

OLMSTED: Yes, a family Bible. The second officer in the embassy, my political officer, Mark Easton, presided over the ceremony, and the actual oath was administered by the consular officer, and the Bible was held by the third officer. So people got very much involved in it. As I say, we broke out the champagne.

Q: Yes. Did that automatically move your political officer to become deputy chief of mission?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: What was he called? Political officer?

OLMSTED: Yes, and when I was away, he became the charg#.

Q: When did the Solomon Islands become included in your mandate? At that time?

OLMSTED: No. It was included rather informally in my mandate initially. As far as I can recall, there were no papers exchanged or anything like that. We just let them know quite

informally that I would be looking after matters affecting the United States in the Solomon Islands from my office in Port Moresby, and I would visit there from time to time.

The Solomon Islands was not then independent. I think there may have been some notice given in London to the British, but I must say my memory is a little faint about that now. The Solomon Islands did not become independent until 1978. It was that time when I was named ambassador and presented my credentials and so on.

Q: And had to be sworn in again?That, again, was under President Ford?

OLMSTED: No, that was under President [Jimmy] Carter in 1978.

Q: Oh, of course. [break in tape]Who was the head of state of Papua New Guinea after independence?

OLMSTED: The head of state was the governor general, who was Sir John Guise. He was a political figure whose career had started as a policeman, and he had eventually gotten into politics and filled various positions. He had been a colleague of the prime minister, but there had been some falling out between them, and I think he was more or less kicked upstairs to become the first governor general. He was a man with considerable political ambitions, but I don't think he realized that he would have no powers. It was a purely ceremonial office, I think he was quite disappointed, and he resigned before his term was out.

Q: What sort of a government do they have?

OLMSTED: It's a modified Westminster-type government with a prime minister who is chosen by a vote of Parliament.

Q: How large is the Parliament?

OLMSTED: About a hundred people. There are about a hundred members of Parliament.

Q: What is the population?

OLMSTED: Three million.

Q: Do they have universal suffrage?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: And education for everybody?

OLMSTED: No, not yet. It's a very primitive country, very, very undeveloped, and it will be a long time before these things can be arranged. When they conduct a national election, it takes three weeks because they don't have enough trained people to hold it simultaneously in all parts of the country. Therefore, they will send teams out to these very remote areas and election officials will go by small plane, even helicopter, and by canoe, and on foot to reach these remote places. Everyone is given a chance to vote, and then the ballots are kept sealed until the election in completed. Then they're counted.

I was there for one election, and it was my definite opinion that although there were a few irregularities, they were dealt with either administratively or in the courts. I thought that it was a remarkably honest and fair election.

Q: What's the literacy rate?

OLMSTED: Well, I think that it is probably someplace around 20%, but it's awfully hard to know. You've also got to make certain assumptions as to what kind of literacy is it. Is it literacy in English you're talking about? There may be some people who are literate in their own language, which is spoken by only a very few people. There are 750 different languages spoken in Papua New Guinea. They have an enormous—

Q: Seven-hundred and fifty languages?

OLMSTED: Yes. An enormous language problem.

Q: How does that happen? Each little area evolves its own speech?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Isn't that amazing? And do most of them have their own literature, or is it all spoken?

OLMSTED: It's very largely spoken. There has been a semi-missionary group, the Summer Institute of Linguistics, which has done a great deal of work in the languages of Papua New Guinea, and they will send a team into a village, where the language has never been written down—[Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

OLMSTED: . . . These linguists will learn the language, the grammar and the vocabulary and eventually write articles in that language. Eventually their intention was to translate the Bible into that language.

Q: How do they vote if a lot of them can't read? Does someone read to them what the ballot is all about?

OLMSTED: It's the whispering vote, as they say. (Laughter) They whisper to the person who is marking the ballot, whoever it is they want to vote for.

Q: But they have decided opinions on whom they want?

OLMSTED: Yes. Clan plays a very important role in this. It's the connections of the people to the person who has been nominated. If they're from the same language group or, even stronger, from the same clan, why, they're likely to vote for that person. But the vote can get divided by two people from the same language group or the same clan.

Q: Do they have family names?

OLMSTED: No. For practical purposes, they take the father's given name as their family name.

Q: Sort of the “Johnson” idea.

OLMSTED: Yes, except they don't add the “son.” Urban people are beginning to give their children the patronymic that the father uses. They're adopting the Western practice, but that is a relatively small group of people.

Q: Of course you read Margaret Mead's books.

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: How much had things changed since she wrote that classic, Growing Up in New Guinea?

OLMSTED: Oh, goodness. I couldn't answer that. It's a very hard country to generalize about.

Q: It must be.

OLMSTED: There's a great deal of variation throughout the country, difference in customs, in practices, difference in language, difference in standards, and so on. I traveled in the villages a fair amount, and it seems to me that every village has its own personality. You can sense that.

Q: What is their feeling about the United States? Do they look on us in a friendly way, or as an overwhelming giant?

OLMSTED: The largest missionary presence in Papua New Guinea is the American missionary presence, and there are many people who have studied at American mission schools and who had Americans as their teachers. By and large, I would say that the

missions made a good impression, the mission teachers and also the mission clinics and hospitals. There are, I'm sure, many people who think they would not be alive, or at least would not be healthy, except that there was an American mission hospital or clinic in their village, and they could go to it and get a cure for their ailment. They may also remember that their favorite teacher was an American teacher. I go into a store and buy something, talk a little bit to the clerk, and the clerk would ask me was I an American. I'd say, “Yes, how did you know?” He would say, “Well, you talk just like my teacher, who is an American.”

Consequently, I think that Americans are well regarded. I also think that the older people who remember the Second World War regard Americans highly. The Japanese were, in many areas, quite cruel in their treatment of the local people, and there was quite a contrast between the way the Japanese treated them in most places, not in every place, and the way the Americans treated them. When the American troops came in, they brought with them just vast quantities of materiel and things like refrigerators and candy bars and everything in between. They had jeeps, they had airplanes, and so on, much more than the Australians ever brought in. It was the first time that the Papua New Guineans realized that there was a country that was more powerful and richer than Australia, and that impressed them.

Another thing that impressed them was the fact that there were black American troops and there were black officers. John Guise, whose name I mentioned a little bit ago, will say—I've heard him say it—that he remembers when he saw American blacks giving orders to American whites in the military, and they were obeyed. He said he saw them doing what looked like, to him, highly skilled work, technical work of one sort or another. This was one of the factors in starting the stirrings of independence, because the people started looking at each other and said, “That man's black and look what he's doing. Why can't I do it, too?”

Q: Isn't that interesting? We cast a wide net, don't we?

OLMSTED: Yes, we do.

Q: Was it any one particular religion that had missions out there?

OLMSTED: The two largest were the Catholics and the Lutherans. And in addition to them, there was everything you have ever heard of.

Q: Did the missionaries fight for territory the way they did in Africa?

OLMSTED: At one time there was a division established, and even today you can almost tell what a person's religion is, if he's a Christian, by the area he comes from. The Catholics had the Sepik area. I've forgotten exactly how far it ran. Then the Anglicans had the northern province. I can't remember what the others were.

Q: But they did divide it up into territories?

OLMSTED: Yes, they did. Therefore, I think there was probably less of the friction that there may have been from other countries. Plus the fact Papua New Guinea covers a fairly wide area, and with three million people, the population is quite spread out.

Q: How does the Solomon Islands differ in the form of government and people's education and so forth? Ethnically, are they the same? I should say racially.

OLMSTED: Yes, they're all Melanesians. Papua New Guinea did not receive very much in the way of economic development or education from the Australians until the early or middle '60s. But I guess it was the early '60s, the Australians were beginning to realize they were going to have to do something with Papua New Guinea. Either they were going to have to incorporate it into Australia as Papua New Guinea or they'd have to let it go. About that time, a British-led UN team wrote a very caustic report on the Australian administration of Papua New Guinea. These two things came together to spur the Australians into action, and they started pouring more money into Papua New Guinea.

They put new emphasis on education. They built primary schools and high schools in many places that had never had schools before. They established a University of Papua New Guinea and a University of Technology, as well, and they stimulated work in the Teachers Colleges and so on. But you can't educate a nation in the matter of a few years. Consequently, at the time of independence, the number of educated, trained, experienced people was very, very small and has been a great handicap to them.

In the Solomon Islands, many of the government leaders were educated in New Zealand with scholarships from the New Zealand government. I thought that the general level of education among the Solomon Islanders in the government was somewhat higher than in Papua New Guinea, although I have never seen a comparative study.

Q: Papua New Guineans who were trained had gotten their education in Australia or from the missionaries?

OLMSTED: Most of them as children went to missionary schools, and then some of them had the chance to go to Australia for their secondary training. The older ones, a few of them, got university training, but not very many. Then about the time larger numbers were coming into the university level in the late 1960's, the University of Papua New Guinea was opened and they started going there.

Of the older group, the prime minister, the minister of foreign affairs, and so on, most of them went to what was a high school at Sogeri. Most of them knew each other because they were the cream of the crop, and the high school at Sogeri was the highest education available to them.

Q: The teachers were Australians?

OLMSTED: Probably, largely, yes.

Q: It was free? The education was free?

OLMSTED: Not only free, but for these schools, the government pays room and board as well as the tuition and also provides them with spending money.

Q: I should imagine that the annual income is pretty low out there, isn't it?

OLMSTED: Yes, it is. Figures aren't very good, aren't very meaningful, about that, but there isn't the sort of poverty that you find in India. Nature is good to Papua New Guinea, and there's plenty of water. In most parts of the country, things grow extremely well.

Q: It's an agricultural country?

OLMSTED: Yes, agriculture is the basis, and fishing along the coastal areas. The ratio of population to land area is very favorable, and therefore there isn't the kind of rural slums that you find in other places. [Tape recorder turned off.]

[Interview of July 11, 1985 begins]

Q: Ambassador Olmsted, we were talking about your experiences in New Guinea. Since they were so different from those of most of the other women ambassadors, I wonder if you would give me a day in the life of the American ambassador to Guinea.

OLMSTED: I often began the day with a quick swim in my little pool, and then had breakfast. One of the things I always missed at breakfast was not being able to read a newspaper, which I had done all my life. But they don't deliver newspapers in Papua New Guinea. You have to go down to the store and buy them. The arrangement was that my driver, after he took me to the office, would pick up the paper, so I would have it in my office maybe five minutes after I got there.

But after breakfast, my driver came and took me to the office. The security people used to tell us we should use a different route going to the office every day but that was quite impossible. There was one way to get there, unless one went perhaps twenty miles out of

the way to take the ring road all the way around Port Moresby. So we followed the same route, driving along the coastline of the Coral Sea, looking out at that magnificent view. I never got tired of looking at it. Then swinging up Paga Pava Hill and to the office.

Once in the office, I would look at the cables, and read the newspaper when it was delivered to me. Then the day would begin. There would be things to discuss with various staff members, perhaps a staff meeting or perhaps just individual discussions. There would be people outside the office to see, perhaps someone to call on in the government, or perhaps a discussion with a colleague from the diplomatic corps. Often I had lunch in town with someone, but I also stayed home, occasionally having luncheons, as was appropriate for the occasion.

We had a surprising number of visitors from the United States in Port Moresby. I sometimes thought that among the well-traveled people of the American Government, there are many who thought they'd been almost everywhere except Papua New Guinea, and therefore they had to stop to see Papua New Guinea as they were making their swing through Eastern Asia. So I might have a visitor to talk to or to take on a call or something like that.

Then I would perhaps have a cable or two to write, and the work of my office staff to review and sign, and then the day would end. We did not often work overtime in Port Moresby, and the office closed at 4:30. We opened at 8:00 and closed at 4:30, because athletics and sports were very important in the lives of people in Port Moresby, and my staff, of course, wanted to be included in that. Many of my staff played golf. Some of them were boaters. One very enterprising young officer built his own sailboat, did a beautiful job on it. Another bought a small boat, and others had other pastimes that they enjoyed. Squash was popular with some members of the staff.

So after work, I would go home and usually check around about household matters and oversee what the house boy had done or had failed to do and what the gardener had done or neglected. Then often there would be a cocktail party or dinner, and perhaps both.

There was a rather lively small social life in Port Moresby. People did quite a bit of entertaining because there really wasn't a great deal of other things to do. There were a couple of theatrical groups which did put on plays from time to time, and I always went to those. Occasionally there would be performances that the government would put on of one sort or another. The National Arts School regularly had showings of their students' work, along with a little reception. I regularly went to those. However, the kind of cultural attractions that one finds in a city like Washington are, of course, quite missing in Port Moresby.

The cocktail parties were sometimes held in the big hotels—they would not be big by American standards—and sometimes in people's houses. So fairly frequently I would go to one of those, and I myself entertained. I had a beautiful view of the Coral Sea from my patio, and I found that small cocktail parties at sunset were an effective way to entertain. It was a good way to entertain visitors, for example, a small enough party so they'd have a chance to talk to people and could enjoy watching the setting sun over the Coral Sea, which is a lovely, lovely sight, and then watch the lights come on around the coastline as the sun went down. Of course, sunset came very quickly and darkness followed promptly as we were close to the equator.

Q: Very dramatic.

OLMSTED: Very dramatic. Some of the dinners that were given, again, were in hotels. When the government entertained, it usually entertained in a hotel. There were a lot of official visitors for the government around the time of independence, and they did indeed entertain them and invite the diplomatic corps.

The diplomatic corps itself usually entertained in their own homes, as did the expatriate community, which was largely Australian. There were a number of Australian businessmen there, banks, insurance people, and so on. They formed part of the group. I found that I circulated in several different groups. First the official group, the government and diplomatic corps. Another, which was related to, but a little apart from it, was the business community, which I, frankly, did not enjoy as much as some of the other groups. The business community tended to be people who were not terribly well educated, not very broad in their outlook; interested in making money and going home. I found them a less appealing group. Another group was the university, and I did make a real effort to cultivate contacts in the university, and I enjoyed people there. I saw quite a bit of them socially and otherwise.

The faculty of the university was like the UN, there were so many different nationalities there. It had originally been Australian, but a ceiling was imposed on the salaries of the faculty at the University of Papua New Guinea when the salaries were still rising in Australia. That meant the Australians, one by one, went back home, and they were replaced by New Zealanders, by Americans, by British, by Indians, Pakistanis, Africans, and so on. There is quite a lively group out there, and I did enjoy them. And another group that I circulated in, which was close to, but not quite the same, was the arts and crafts group, the people who were interested in the arts and in the artifacts and in buying and learning about the New Guinean artwork, particularly from the Sepik, but also some of the other carvings and weavings and things like that.

Q: Wood carvings?

OLMSTED: Yes, largely. A few of other things, but largely wood carvings, bone and a few other things.

Q: Do they do any work in bronze?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: No metals?

OLMSTED: Copper beating is not traditional, but it is done there. It has been introduced by the Westerners, and that top piece there is a Papua New Guinea copper beating. I have some others. The National Art School was trying to teach the students to use their traditional motifs, but in modern or different media, and one of them was copper beating.

Q: Do they do the feather weaving?

OLMSTED: No. That is Polynesian. They traditionally have done some tapa work, but that is dying out. Wood carving is surely the most important of their styles of art, and some of the pieces are quite large: poles, for example, and very large masks, what they call the orator's stool, which is a large mask, sometimes six feet tall or even taller. It's built on the side of a small stool which is not intended to be sat upon. In the men's houses, (where all the men of the village live) when a speaker is making an address to his colleagues and friends and neighbors, he will stand beside his orator's stool with a little batch of vines in his hand, or reeds, or something like that. When he makes a point, he will strike this little seat there to emphasize what he is saying.

Q: Fascinating! The picture there with the men with their head pieces. What did you call those?

OLMSTED: Those are called the wig men of the Southern Highlands. They cut off their hair and then weave it into a sort of a hat and decorate it and dye it and so on. I have a picture of one man who has decorated his wig with what is obviously a label from a can of salmon.

Q: Charming. Do they still do this?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Is this a token of their virility or that they're chiefs?

OLMSTED: No, not that they're chiefs. They all do it. I went to a ceremony at which a school was named after an American missionary who wrote me and invited me to come up for the ceremony. This was in the Southern Highlands, and it was at a point where two tribes came together. The land was divided, one tribe on one side, one tribe on another. They had a great big sing-sing with representatives, vast numbers of people from both of the tribes, which dress somewhat differently, and that gave a particularly colorful appearance to the scene.

The ceremony started out with speeches and gift-giving. This was during the elections and the politicians came to take advantage of the opportunity to make political speeches. Then the organizers presented me with two stone axes and two grass skirts and a live chicken.

Q: And a live chicken!

OLMSTED: I gave the chicken to the missionary quite hastily and I never saw it again.

Q: Did the chicken represent anything particular, or were they just being kind to give you a chicken?

OLMSTED: Well, it was an appropriate gift from their point of view.

Q: What are the lives of the women like in Papua New Guinea? Of course, they would be quite different in the highlands than they would in the city, I suppose.

OLMSTED: You have to make several distinctions. There is one part of Papua New Guinea which is referred to by anthropologists as the Massim, which includes most, but not all, of the groups of people along the coast and in the islands off to the east of Papua New Guinea, along the east and northern coast and extends into Irian Jaya. Generally

speaking, among these people there is a matrilineal society. The inheritance goes through the mother, and the father plays a relatively small role in his family. The mother's brother will bring up the children, and he will be the important man in the family. He will pass the secrets of sorcery down to his nephews, not to his sons. In those areas, the woman has a considerably more important position than in the others. Customs vary considerably throughout even the Massim, but a woman may have the right to decide who gets which piece of land, clan-owned land, and this gives her really quite a strong position. The women from those areas have a higher position and are moving into government jobs and so on in a way that the women from the rest of the country find very difficult to do.

The other women, the highlanders and those from many other parts of the country, are very much pushed back. There's no question about that. When I went to the Southern Highlands, it was announced on the radio that a big important visitor, a foreign visitor, was coming from Port Moresby to be present at this ceremony. They told me that the announcer had a very hard time saying that a woman was important. It was very difficult for him to bring himself to do that. Finally, he managed it. (Laughter)

Q: It flew in the face of all his traditions.

OLMSTED: Absolutely. And the practice of having several wives prevails in the highlands. The men generally live in men's houses, as a group apart from the women, and visit their wives from time to time.

Q: Do the women live together?

OLMSTED: No, they live in separate houses.

Q: Each mother with her children?

OLMSTED: Yes, and the pigs.

Q: The pigs are in the house?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Are the pigs there for foodstuffs?

OLMSTED: Yes. They're very important in the traditional economy, and they're a sign of wealth. The more pigs a person has, by all means the more important he is.

Q: Is it considered somewhat of a disgrace to have a baby daughter, to give birth to a girl?

OLMSTED: I don't think so, no. You see, they still have a system of bride price, which means that the family of the prospective husband has to pay the family of the bride in order to get her, and that means that a daughter is a source of wealth.

Q: Of course. What do they pay, usually?

OLMSTED: There are traditional forms of payment. It might be pigs and cassowaries. It might be shells and shell money and things like that, but in addition, as the modern world moves upon them, you will sometimes see, in a procession, a long pole to which paper money has been tied, and that is part of the bride price.

Q: Is divorce current?

OLMSTED: No. Strange, I can't even remember hearing about divorce. I think a husband would probably take another wife.

Q: And just ignore the first one?

OLMSTED: Just ignore the first one.

Q: Does he have to provide housing for each one of these families he sets up?

OLMSTED: I'm sure there is some variation in the country on that. Ordinarily I think they would all live in the same house, but in some places they may be accustomed to have separate houses.

Q: Then when they become old, the children take care of the mothers?

OLMSTED: The clan takes care. The family does, yes.

Q: There is a social security built into the system.

OLMSTED: Yes, and an older woman has a place of respect.

Q: Very good. They spend most of their time in domestic pursuits?

OLMSTED: Well, the women do the work. (Laughter) They're the farmers. The men will clear the land and the men will go to war, the men will sit around talking and smoking and enjoying themselves. It's the women who go out and plant and cultivate and harvest.

Q: And have the children and raise them.

OLMSTED: Yes, and do the housework.

Q: How do they dress the children nowadays? In Western-type clothing?

OLMSTED: Yes, except in rather remote places you will see the children wearing shorts and little shirts and that sort of thing.

Q: Are they purchased or made?

OLMSTED: Largely made. I visited the Western province, a really quite remote place, a town called Kiunga, and visited a shop that had been set up under the guidance of some very enlightened missionaries there. First they taught the women to cook food in bulk so they could sell hot meals to the men who were working on the roads, most of whom had

come from the highlands and were there without their wives. After they made a little money from that, they bought some sewing machines and the missionaries taught the women how to make clothes. First they clothed their own families, and then they started selling the clothes. They sold the clothes again to the highland workers on the roads, who would take them back to their families when they went home. They built up a nice little business like that. This is where the status of women can be tremendously improved when they become breadwinners and they do things for the family, bringing in money and recognition.

Shortly before I went there, the missionaries told me with a good deal of pride, that now the men were coming to them and asking would the missionaries teach them how to run a trade store, because they had seen the women making money, and they thought, well, the next step was that they would do the selling.

Q: Did you find among the women that they desired upward mobility for their children, the mothers for their daughters?

OLMSTED: Not in all cases. Life in the village still had its attractions, and there was a certain amount of burnout among the young people who went to university, then got a job in the government and were under stress and pressure. Some of them would go home again and want to have a quieter life. I think this had some effect on the way that people viewed moving into the modern life. They wanted some of the things that modern life could bring them; not all of them.

Q: Good sense of values, then.

OLMSTED: Yes, yes, that's true.

Q: How many wives did the typical man have? Was it prescribed by law, the way it is here?

OLMSTED: No. Oh, no. Probably three or four, yes. But in Port Moresby, they rarely had more than one wife.

Q: Because they couldn't afford it?

OLMSTED: Yes. Members of Parliaments could leave their families at home and they might have two or three wives. Of course, as they became Christian, the Christian Church frowned on this, and sometimes there would be one wife who was the church wife and the others were married by local custom and were outside the church.

Q: Ways to get around it! (Laughter)

OLMSTED: Oh, yes.

Q: Do the different families get along or is there a lot of squabbling among the half-siblings and the wives?

OLMSTED: I don't really know.

Q: It wasn't something that was sung about or jokes made about?

OLMSTED: No. I think they probably got along fairly well together, but I don't really know.

Q: Did sisters, perhaps, marry the same man?

OLMSTED: Not particularly.

Q: Fascinating. Was life very much different for them in the city, in Port Moresby?

OLMSTED: Yes. Housing accommodations were really quite tight in Port Moresby and there were the squatter settlements. If someone came into town without a job, he would probably live with one of his relatives or, to use the pidgin word, wan tok. It means “one talk,” one speech. It means a person speaking the same language. And with 750

languages, you could see that this is important. The person coming in from the highlands or elsewhere wanting the bright lights of the city would probably move in with the wan toks and would scrounge around trying to get whatever work he could. But ordinarily he wouldn't speak English. He wouldn't have the skills that are needed, and this would be quite difficult for him unless he were particularly fortunate. Consequently, all too many of them turned to theft and burglary, and so there's a real crime problem in Port Moresby, which I understand has become considerably worse since I left.

Q: You mentioned that the security people suggested you go by a different route each day, which is not physically possible. Do they have a problem with terrorists now?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: This was just—

OLMSTED: This is just garden variety petty crime.

Q: Mugging?

OLMSTED: Yes, and snatching purses and breaking into houses. I might add, many of the houses there, particularly the older ones built by Australians, were really quite flimsy. They were built of fiberboard, and many of them had the louvered windows. This combination provides very little security.

Q: In the highlands, what was the form of housing? Were they built of wood?

OLMSTED: Thatched houses and dirt floors. In many parts of the country, the houses are built on stilts, but that's not generally the practice in the highlands.

Q: How large is Port Moresby?

OLMSTED: A little more than a hundred thousand—a hundred fifteen or a hundred twenty.

Q: Is there a regular Western-type shopping section?

OLMSTED: Yes, there are several. It's built more like some fairly modern cities, small cities in the United States, with shopping sections scattered around and houses around the shopping sections.

Q: You mentioned the American visitors coming. Did you have to put up any of them, or did they all stay in hotels?

OLMSTED: I put them up for quite a while, and then when the hotel situation improved, depending on who it was perhaps they stayed in hotels.

Q: Are there American hotels there?

OLMSTED: No, they're all Australian. If not Australian-run, there's probably some Australian money in most of the hotels there.

Q: The Australians, of course, are still a very large presence there, but America is coming in more and more, economically?

OLMSTED: Well, at the time I was there, there was interest on the part of Americans, and I might add it was the big firms. It's too far away for a small firm to get interested in. Just for selling things, the American firms usually depended on their Australian subsidiaries to handle the sales. But big firms like Weyerhaeuser and Kennecott would come through from time to time, look the situation over, and perhaps make some moves in the direction of an investment, but then pull back. Bechtel built the copper mine in Bougainville and also has the contract for building the new one in the Western Province.

Q: I'm surprised there hasn't been a Marriott Hotel. It sounds such a beautiful country. I thought it could be developed for tourism.

OLMSTED: Well, there is some tourism, but the government, as of the time I was there, had not really made up its mind that it wanted a lot of tourism. It had very mixed feelings about it. Fiji, as you may know, has gone in a big way into tourism, and the Papua New Guineans were not entirely sure they liked the result. They felt that there were a few jobs created, but not many. A lot of money was being skimmed off and taken out of the country, and a lot of things that they didn't particularly like were being brought in. They did not want to have the drug culture brought in, and they were concerned over the flaunting of wealth and so on that might make the people dissatisfied.

Q: They sound like a very sensible people.

OLMSTED: Yes, they are. One of the things they were trying to do, which I thought made a lot of sense, was very small-scale specialized tourism like orchid safaris and butterfly safaris and white water rafting and things like that.

Q: Where a certain amount of knowledge is necessary before you can appreciate it, so you get a different class of clientele.

OLMSTED: And also it's not the class that demands the best of accommodations, because they're willing to put up with the hardships and in fact rather enjoy it.

Lindblad made an arrangement with a little resort up on the north coast that they would bring a certain number of tours, but they did it specifying that no improvements would be made in the resort, no changes. For bathing, you would go out to a cloth-enclosed area and take your shower from a bucket that has some holes punched in it hung on a pole. That's the sort of thing that they wanted left intact.

Q: Give their customers something to talk about when they got home.

OLMSTED: Absolutely.

Q: What are the natural resources there? You've mentioned that they have copper.

OLMSTED: Yes, copper, and there is gold and probably other minerals. They spent quite a bit of money looking for oil, and they found some natural gas, but they haven't found, as far as I'm aware, anything in the way of petroleum. They have very rich forestry resources, which they are a little reluctant to develop too fast because of the fear of deforestation.

Q: That's why Weyerhaeuser came in?

OLMSTED: Yes, and there were others that were looking around.

Q: Have they developed the natural gas resource?

OLMSTED: No, not as far as I'm aware. Not as the time I left. They have fishery resources which will probably become quite important, and they have agricultural resources. In the highlands there are broad, fertile valleys with rich volcanic soil and lots of rain, lots of sunshine, and they can grow just about anything that doesn't require cold weather. They can get two and three crops a year. They are developing coffee and have quite significant coffee areas now. They found coffee was much more appropriate than tea, because coffee doesn't require the same careful care that tea does. The non-disciplined worker who won't show up can ruin a tea plantation by neglect, whereas with coffee, they can pick the coffee berries when they get around to it and go off for tribal fighting the other times.

Q: The men do this work?

OLMSTED: The men do some of it. The women do a lot of the coffee picking, too.

Q: Do they have canneries for the fish?

OLMSTED: Not as of the time I was there. They were negotiating with Star Kist, the tuna company, for a long time, but had not reached an agreement as of the time I left, and I don't believe they have yet.

They also have copra as a traditional crop, and the coconut plantations are really very lovely. They are very, very pretty. But they are being replaced by palm oil and things like that, which are much more profitable. Those are growing very well on some of the islands and some of the coastal areas, and they have cocoa, as well.

Q: Is the climate similar to that of the Hawaiian Islands, in that it's very even throughout the year?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Does it get very hot there?

OLMSTED: In some places it gets pretty hot, but the trade winds generally have cooling currents.

Q: It really sounds like a paradise. Is it considered a hardship post, in that it is isolated?

OLMSTED: Yes, I believe it's now classified as a hardship post.

Q: How large was the diplomatic colony?

OLMSTED: When I arrived there, the Australians, of course, were the administering power. In addition to them, the British and the Indonesians had already established their first offices. So the United States was the third to open there. We were closely followed by the New Zealanders, who came in almost immediately after. Let me see. Who was next? Now my memory's a little hazy. The French then later opened up an embassy. Oh, yes,

the Japanese came in then after that, and then I think the French were next. It seems to me we had a diplomatic corps of six or seven, which then expanded after I left.

Q: Quite rapidly, I suppose.

OLMSTED: Fairly rapidly. The Papua New Guineans were not terribly enthusiastic about having a lot of foreign nations. They didn't see the need for them, and they weren't intending to open up a lot of posts themselves. They thought that their business could be handled in other ways with third countries, where both of them were represented and so on.

Q: Were you particularly friendly with any one of the groups?

OLMSTED: I was on much friendlier terms with the second British High Commissioner than I was with the first. With the New Zealanders, I was on much better terms with the second than the first, again. So you know, it changed from time to time.

Q: Of course.

OLMSTED: We were really a close-knit little group and we did have our little get-togethers. I certainly made an effort to observe the niceties of diplomatic relations.

Q: Did they have a Chamber of Commerce in Port Moresby?

OLMSTED: Yes, there was one. It was Australian, almost completely Australian.

Q: I was wondering if you were consulted about business problems.

OLMSTED: I had American business people coming through and wanting to talk to me, [Begin Tape 2, Side 4]

OLMSTED: . . . to the representatives of the multinational corporations. I had representatives of American banks also call on me. This began a little bit before

independence, when representatives of the big New York banks who were in the area decided they would test the waters in Papua New Guinea and they would visit first with the local banking establishment and then come around and see me.

Six months later, I would see the same people or representatives of the same banks again, and they were testing the water again. And six months later, they would come for their next visit. They became a little more interested with each visit, and finally decided that Papua New Guinea was here to stay and they might find some good business here. So they started out with extending a line of credit which was to be used for the purchase of coffee and then sales abroad. Now I expect that has developed considerably, but it was interesting watching it grow bit by bit.

Q: We were mentioning the host government officials and your interaction with them. Would you repeat what you said about the fact that you were not a young woman?

OLMSTED: Yes. I did not have any difficulties in dealing with the host country officials, and I think it was an advantage that I was both a foreign woman and an older woman. As I mentioned before, older women do have a status in the traditional community that a young woman does not have. I saw my role as developing a good working relationship with the foreign minister and with his immediate subordinate, who was the secretary in the Department of Foreign Affairs. I was fortunate in that both of these men were married to women who were educated and who were strong figures. The wife of the foreign minister had been educated as a nurse and had gone out of the home to work as a nurse.

The story of their courtship, I might tell you as an aside, is really quite interesting. As a young man, Albert Maori Kiki had gone to Fiji to study to become a doctor. Well, he didn't pass his courses, so he became a medical technician instead of a doctor. But while he was there, he became interested in politics and decided he would also go into politics. At the same time, he decided that he wanted to have a wife to help him in this, so he wrote a letter to one of his relatives in Port Moresby, asking him to suggest someone who would

make a good wife for him. This relative suggested a woman named Elizabeth, who was then studying nursing and came from the same area, same general background that Albert Maori KiKi had. So he wrote her a letter saying that he wanted to marry her. She was attending a Catholic school, was quite shocked by this, and showed it to the nuns, and decided that she wouldn't answer him. Then he wrote her a second letter, which she also showed. The nuns said to her, “Well, he seems like a very sincere, honest man. Maybe you should answer.” But she was too shy to do it. But he persisted and he was back in Port Moresby on vacation and went around and looked her up and talked to her, and talked her into marrying. That was the courtship. (Laughter)

Q: By correspondence.

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: He must have had a very persuasive pen.

OLMSTED: Yes. And the wife of the secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs was a university graduate, and she was working in the Department of Education. She was an intelligent woman.

Q: These people became your personal friends, as well as official friends?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: You had mentioned that you felt your role was to help establish the U.S. presence there. They had been very favorably impressed by Americans during the war, you said.

OLMSTED: Yes. I think the American troops were quite highly regarded during the Second World War. They were generous and they obviously had much wealth in the way of material possessions, which impressed the local people. As I may have mentioned before, there were black officers in the American troops. That made a favorable impression.

But after [Douglas] MacArthur took the troops from Papua New Guinea into the Philippines, there was no official American presence at all. Once in a while our embassy in Canberra would send someone out to make a swing through Papua New Guinea, and six months later the person would come back. But there was no American official who was resident in Papua New Guinea until I opened our post in 1974. Consequently, I thought that one of the most important things I could do to establish good relations would be to portray the United States as having a sympathetic and friendly interest in a small emerging country. Consequently, I spent a great deal of time on what was essentially public relations work.

Q: Representation in the sense of representing your country.

OLMSTED: Yes, a very broad sense of representation. At the time of independence, lots and lots of small ceremonies were taking place: the introduction of the new currency, the turnover by the Australians of certain military equipment. I was invited—the diplomatic corps was invited to these things, and I made a point to go to them, to demonstrate my interest. Not all of the diplomatic corps did, but I was always there. When they introduced the new currency, I had a twenty-dollar bill that I could take up to the teller and change into the new currency, and the Finance Minister said later it made him feel very good to see someone changing an important currency like American dollars into kina.

Q: How nice!

OLMSTED: I tried to entertain more broadly than I think a diplomat ordinarily does. They had a women's conference in Port Moresby drawing in women from all over the country, and I had a reception for the women and displayed some photographs and printed material and so on from the American women's movement. When I gave large receptions, I tried to include university students and some of the more junior people from the government. I did a lot of traveling, and we visited schools and went to whatever they thought was appropriate to go to.

I visited places in the country that most diplomats don't go to. I took a seven-day trip in a dug-out canoe on the Sepik River, and spent the nights in little haus kiaps [huts on stilts] along the way and looked at the artwork and the haus tambarans [spirit houses] and so on. I made sure that I got out of the narrow proper diplomatic circuit as it was traditionally viewed.

Q: You seem to have had a tremendous understanding of the people's ideas and ways of thinking, that you could lend yourself to so many of their activities.

OLMSTED: I found them very interesting people, and did a lot of reading. One of my friends was the head of the Anthropology Department at the University of Papua New Guinea, an American woman. I talked with her many, many times.

Q: That must have been very helpful.

OLMSTED: Yes. She had done a lot of field work. She had spent fourteen years there. As I say, I tried to get out of the beaten path.

Q: What did you have your USIS person do?

OLMSTED: Initially we did not have a USIS person. USIA refused to send someone out for the opening of the post, and my political officer spent about half his time and did, really, a very good job in stimulating activities. It wasn't until I had been there, I suppose, two years that we finally had a USIS officer assigned to the Embassy. He, of course, was more active and had more experience than the other, and he did an excellent job.

One of the things we did was to put in a little amphitheater on the hillside behind the chancery. There we had American films twice a week, free. Sometimes we had things by invitation only, but a lot of them were open to anyone who wanted to come.

Q: Did you open a library?

OLMSTED: Yes, eventually we opened a library. It must have been nearly a year after the USIA officer got there that we were able to get that set up. He established contacts with the university and the schools and so on. We had a very active program of leadership grants, and we certainly managed to send to the United States a lot of people who became important in government. That was, I felt, a very important contribution that we made.

Q: Did any visiting American musicians come?

OLMSTED: We didn't have very much in that way, but we did manage to get a Navy band to put on three nights of concerts for us, and those were very popular, very popular indeed. It was a dance band, and they put on the big time music. What do they call it? The music of about thirty years ago, thirty or forty years ago.

Q: The "big band" era.

OLMSTED: The "big band". That's the phrase I'm thinking of, yes. We had a few others. We had people coming through giving lectures, not all of which were well attended, but some of them were, and we did get some good people coming to them.

Q: How much of your time was spent actually running the mission—that is, the nuts and bolts and the budget and that sort of thing?

OLMSTED: I don't know, maybe 30%. That's a very rough guess.

Q: Did you have any women officers there at any time?

OLMSTED: Yes. We had a junior rotational officer who came there and spent two years with us.

Q: Did you have anybody from Agriculture?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: No attach# from Agriculture or Commerce or anything like that?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: What about the other agencies?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: No representation? How did you feel about the quality of your State personnel? Did they send good people?

OLMSTED: Yes, I thought by and large they did. They tended to be quite young and rather gung-ho, but I sometimes had to hold onto their coat-tails. I'd rather have that sort of a person in a post like Port Moresby than those who had become old and cynical and even embittered.

Q: I dare say that many of them had asked to go there, hadn't they?

OLMSTED: Yes. It was considered a very exotic place and the word got back that the assignments there were good assignments. They had the chance to do real things. I had an economic officer there who had completed the work for his Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota and was on his first assignment. He set up his own little shop and presented me with an outline of what he wanted to accomplish, and I told him to go to it. He had a very free hand and he found it a very rewarding assignment.

Q: I can imagine. Did you take particular steps to see that the very junior officers received proper training?

OLMSTED: Yes, to the extent that I could. But they were doing the training themselves, actually. We had a brand-new local staff with no experience whatsoever, and the junior officers, I thought, did an excellent job in training the local staff and encouraging them. My secretary taught them touch-typing and the officers encouraged them to

take correspondence courses, one in commercial work, another in consular work from Washington, and helped them with it, and they helped them with their English. They gave them responsibility. I think we had a loyalty from our local staff that was the envy of the diplomatic community.

Q: I can imagine!

OLMSTED: There was a very high rate of turnover among the local employees in Port Moresby, not only of the diplomatic staffs, but throughout. After a young person had been on the job for six months, he looked around for what else he could get that would be new and interesting and pay better. By giving them more responsibility, by teaching them, by giving them increases, we held onto ours. It turned out to be very effective.

Q: Excellent!

[July 18, 1985 interview begins]

Q: Ambassador Olmsted, could you tell us more about the seven-day trip you took, that you mentioned in the last session that we had?

OLMSTED: Yes. I became friendly with the chairman of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Papua New Guinea. She was an American woman who had been in Papua New Guinea about fourteen years. She had done extensive fieldwork, particularly in the small islands and in the coastal areas, and she had a wealth of information about Papua New Guinea. I enjoyed her very much and learned a great deal from her. Once I said to her that if she were going off on a field trip and needed someone to carry her briefcase, or the anthropologist equivalent thereof, that I would like to join her. She thought that was a good idea, and talked to another friend of hers who was the wife of the head of the Geography Department at the University of Papua New Guinea. Annje Clark was her name. She was a German who was married to an American, Bill Clark.

So the three of us started making plans for some sort of a jaunt, and we finally decided that we would do what is known as the Middle Sepik, which is the middle section of the Sepik River, a very long river that runs slowly through the western part of Papua New Guinea and finally enters the sea along the north coast.

Annje Clark had been taking a series of lecture courses at the university in the art of Papua New Guinea, and she said that she would be willing to do a good deal of the planning of the trip, so that worked out very nicely. Ann Chowning had the extensive background. Anjie would make the plans for where we should stop and what we should look at on the Sepik River, and I went along as a more or less freeloader on this expedition.

We flew to Wewak on the north coast and hired a Land Rover which drove us to the site where we were to get our canoe. We were planning to hire a motorized dugout canoe. We had sent a message ahead to a man who rented such canoes, and to our dismay, when we arrived in Wewak, discovered he had received our message only that morning. However, fortunately, he said that he could accommodate us.

So we took a day's trip over very bad roads in the Land Rover to get to the point where we would start our journey. We rented a 43-foot dugout canoe with seats on the floor and backrests, which was a great advantage, an outboard motor, and extra supplies of gasoline and a crew of two young fellows who must have been in their late teens. Not long after we started out, we picked up a third crew member, who was a freeloader, a friend of the two boys who were our crew, and we had no objection with him going along. He joined in and helped with the work as well.

The Sepik River is a slow-moving, wide river which frequently changes its course. There are reeds in many areas and it's quite swampy in many places. The boys frequently thought they knew a shortcut going from one curve of the river to another, but we regularly got stuck in the reeds as we were trying to save time. I don't think we saved any time at all.

We spent the first night in a house that had been occupied by the district officer, but there was no one living it in at the time. It was terribly dirty, a very, very messy place, but we put our bedrolls on top of the beds and put up our mosquito nettings, which are very essential in that area, and cooked a little dinner. Then the next morning, we had cold rice and bully beef for breakfast, and that was the beginning that gave me an idea of what our cuisine was likely to be for the remainder of the trip.

We started off well loaded down with our gear and the extra gasoline. We took some food along, but we had expected we would be able to buy food from the people as we went down the river. This proved, however, to be a mistaken impression, because the rains had been either early or late—I've forgotten which—and the crops were delayed. Consequently the local people had very little food to sell. Our diet was rather limited.

We stopped at various places that Annje had planned for us to stop, to look at haus tambarans, which are the spirit houses. They are closer to churches than anything else, but it's not exactly the same. They were used for religious purposes originally. We wondered whether they were still being used for religious purposes, even though the area was nominally Christian, and suspected that due to the good condition they were in, they probably were. At one place we stopped, a Catholic church had been built encompassing some of the carvings from the haus tambaran, which apparently was no longer existing. It is rather startling to see this large Catholic church made of corrugated iron roof and open sides, with these magnificent carvings of pagan deities and whatnot in it, but it was very clever of whoever made the decision, I think, to encompass them, to encourage the people to participate in the church.

We stopped at various villages, as I say, to look at the haus tambarans and also other carvings. Some villages were particularly noted for their carvings. It's quite interesting to walk through these villages and sometimes see, just standing out, fenceposts that had been carved, really very beautifully carved, and sometimes there would be a very handsome figure of an ancestor or deity or something of the sort just standing there. The

haus tambarans are not very substantially built. Many of them are quite high, some of them as much as sixty feet high, entirely built of local materials, that is, forest materials, no nails or anything like that in them. The front is usually painted with the faces of ancestors. You often enter a haus tambaran through a very narrow aperture often, although some of them are completely open at the lower level and you have to go up a ladder to get to the second floor, which may be the more important place. In a few of them, they didn't want us to enter, and we were very, very careful to follow directions.

Outside some of them are sacred rocks, and we were told, “Don't touch the sacred rocks.” Believe me, we followed the instructions very, very carefully. These rocks would be quite different from anything that you would see in that area, and no one knew where they came from or how they had been brought there or when or by whom, but obviously they'd been there for a long time.

We spent the night, each night, at a haus kiap which is a house made of native materials, always on stilts, and built so that government people or others could have a place to stay, because these are really traditional villages with no hotels, no facilities. There was no electricity, there was no running water, nothing like that. There is nothing in a haus kiap. It's absolutely empty. You go up a ladder and the floors are made of palm branches and are not very substantial. You have to be very careful or you'll step through. If you do step through, you're very likely to get a bad scratch on your leg, and if you do that, it's very likely to get infected. I had already had one topical ulcer and that certainly made me very careful not to run the risk of getting a second one.

We would unload our gear and get settled in the haus kiap, and then usually walk around the village for a little while and talk to people. Ann Chowning spoke excellent pidgin, which was widely spoken in that area, and she was the interpreter for us. She said to me that it was very hard for her to explain in pidgin who I was. They understood that she was from the university. They had heard about the university, and she even ran into one or two of her former students. She explained that Annje was the wife of another professor at

the university. But to explain what an American ambassador was, was just beyond her. (Laughter)

Q: How large were these villages, as a rule?

OLMSTED: Oh, anyplace from 50 to 500 people. One of them might have been 1,000.

Q: Is it a tribal unit?

OLMSTED: A clan unit. There are many, many languages spoken along the Sepik River. A tribe usually describes a language group. It has no political significance. The clan is the largest group that has a political significance.

We would walk around the village and talk to people, and then come back and fix our dinner. The boys with us would go someplace else, and they usually had friends or relatives or could make acquaintances and would be put up in somebody's house. When we walked around the village, we frequently asked if we could go into a house and look at it, and the people were quite willing to have us do that. It was very interesting.

Q: What are they like?

OLMSTED: Most of them are quite large. They're houses on stilts, and you climb up a ladder and enter into a quite dark but rather large sort of loft area. They're not divided by rooms; everything is out. The mosquitoes are extremely bad in that area, just dreadful. This was a problem for them, and they often left a lighted fire for the smoke to drive the mosquitoes away. The fires were built in a pottery dish, a large dish, curved, which is typical of that area. They're quite handsome pieces. The smoke would just go up from them and filter out through the roofs. I don't remember if they had any chimneys. In one place we saw something that is traditional in that area, but not used very much anymore as a means of keeping away from the mosquitoes at night, and that is a large tube that the

whole family would crawl into. It's sort of a crocheted tube, and the whole family would get in that to stay away from the mosquitoes.

In one place we saw where they were having a little ceremony to drive the mosquitoes out, and the ceremony consisted of a group of young people running through the village with flares and with anything that would make noise.

Q: Noise will drive them away? (Laughter)

OLMSTED: Well, that was the theory. It made me think of the old saying, “Don't just stand there; do something.” And they were doing something, however ineffective it might be.

Q: Isn't that touching!

OLMSTED: Another place, a ceremony was being held to celebrate the maturity of a little girl, the puberty ceremony. They said we could come in and watch part of it. The women of the village were singing and dancing; this would go on all night, and then at dawn they would take her out to the stream, where they would ritually bathe her. They said we could not go to that. I didn't want to stay up that late, anyhow. (Laughter) It was quite interesting watching this.

Q: At what age do the girls become women?

OLMSTED: I would say ten, eleven, along in there.

Q: Are they marriageable at that age?

OLMSTED: Marriage customs differ in different parts of the country. I would say that in some cases they would probably marry fairly soon thereafter, and in other places probably not.

Then we continued on down the river. We took a branch off the river at one place to visit what is known as the black water area, called because it has very dark water in it, and we could see the reflections of the buildings and the trees in the waters. Very, very pretty. The water was quite cool, and we went in swimming and had a nice excursion there.

In another place, we wanted to get out of the canoe and walk to a village about five miles away to see the kinds of pottery that they made there, which was somewhat different from other pottery in that area. So we walked along on a path through the forest for about five miles and crossed many streams on rickety little bridges, or else we crossed on logs that had been put down, and finally got to the village. I was rather tired by that time, so they sent a little boy up a coconut tree and he brought down some coconuts. They sliced them open and we drank the coconut milk. It was cool and it tasted so good.

Then we looked at what they had in the way of pottery. I'll show you one.

Q: Are the potters the men or the women or both?

OLMSTED: Mostly women, but I'm sure in some places there are men, too.

Q: That is nice. [Referring to pottery]

OLMSTED: This is a completely utilitarian piece.

Q: Oh, that is stunning.

OLMSTED: It is used to put around the fire, and you put your pot on two or three of these. You see there are holes in it.

Q: Sort of like a trivet.

OLMSTED: Yes. There are holes here and you put vines, string two or three of them with vines to hold them together, and then you put your pot on it.

Q: Has that one been used?

OLMSTED: I don't know.

Q: It's dark. Is that the color they bake it?

OLMSTED: I think it's the color they bake it. One of the interesting things about this is how they decorate the most utilitarian things. I understand anthropologists say that a primitive people will usually perfect the item technically before they decorate it, but in Papua New Guinea they decorate it first. They are very artistic.

Q: Very artistic people, yes. They must be. What are the meanings of those markings? Do they tattoo themselves?

OLMSTED: In some places. They paint very extensively, but in some places they do tattoo.

Q: Is that supposed to represent a hearth god or a goddess? It's a person, obviously.

OLMSTED: I don't know. I would doubt that it has any religious significance. I think that they're just so in the habit of decorating things that when they made this, they just put a face on it.

Q: That's charming. Did you buy this at that village?

OLMSTED: Yes. So we continued down until we got to the point where we had arranged for a car to come and pick us up. In our last stop, I've forgotten the name of the village, which was a larger village, there was a little motel there. It was a not very impressive hotel, but it looked great to us, and we were able to take showers. (Laughter)

Q: Must have been sheer joy! (Laughter)

OLMSTED: Yes. And we sat down and had a table and had a meal brought to us. That seemed like a really big thing.

But I should mention that at one of the villages where we stopped, we had a letter to an artist in that village who had actually traveled abroad to show his things. He'd gone to some conference in Mexico that the government had arranged for him to go to. When we gave him the letter, he was very interested and invited us to have dinner with him and his family. He served us turtle. I didn't care much for it.

Q: You mean a boiled turtle?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Probably chewy, wasn't it?

OLMSTED: Yes, it was. It was. Then the next night, why, he again invited us, and for that occasion, he went out and shot a wild pig, so we had pork.

Q: You had said that pigs were very important.

OLMSTED: Yes. It's a sign of wealth. It's a way of accumulating wealth.

Q: It's something that's always transferable, I suppose. It's liquid wealth. (Laughter)

OLMSTED: Yes. The vehicle that came to pick us up was not a jeep, which was really needed in those areas, but a passenger car. Very shortly after we got started, it got badly stuck in the mud, and all three of us had to get out and push. (Laughter) Deep mud. And we were sorry that there wasn't someone there to take a picture of us for the final hour of our trip.

Q: I should say! Did you take any pictures while you were there?

OLMSTED: Oh, yes. I took a lot.

Q: I don't think I would have enjoyed the mosquitoes and the insects, but otherwise it sounds like a wonderful trip. One other thing that you mentioned the other day that I would like to ask you more about is the amphitheater that you said you put in. The U.S. had brought property, had it?

OLMSTED: No. We leased and made an arrangement with an Australian firm there to build our chancery which they built according to our specifications on the upper end of a steeply slanting lot. The chancery is very close to the street, and behind us we had quite an area of land which was being used for nothing. Every time I looked at it, I began wishing we could somehow develop it. So eventually we came up with the idea of putting in a small amphitheater.

Q: What a clever idea!

OLMSTED: Where films could be shown and other entertainment provided; lectures and education and so on.

Q: Did you have it terraced and have benches put on the terraces?

OLMSTED: It was slightly terraced and benches were put in. There was a little stage with large logs behind it to form the background for it.

Q: The weather was such that except in the rainy season, I suppose, you could use it all the time.

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: What a wonderful idea! I'm surprised you could talk FBO [Foreign Buildings Office] into it. (Laughter)

The other day we were discussing your carrying out policy in Papua New Guinea. I wondered if we could pick up there. We did talk about your representing the United States to the people, and the necessity for USIS in getting to know the people.

OLMSTED: In addition to that, I was in touch with the government of Papua New Guinea on various items that were coming up in the UN, and asking for their support such matters. I found, generally speaking, that either they would abstain or would be willing to vote along with us. There were a lot of matters that they felt, as a new country, they did not want to get tangled up in, and they didn't want to devote their rather scarce resources of trained manpower struggling with certain international problems that they felt did not affect them. But on the other hand, where there was something that would affect them or that they had a broad interest in, they were certainly willing to listen to what I had to say, and often did support our position.

Q: So in other words, the business of the UN is really conducted back in the country of origin?

OLMSTED: In a case like Papua New Guinea, yes.

Q: Did they have a representative at the UN?

OLMSTED: They initially had an ambassador in Washington, who was also accredited to the UN. Later on they moved him to New York when they got more interested in UN business, and he would visit Washington from time to time, but his main business was in the UN. He became very interested in the UN, and he felt there was a role that Papua New Guinea could play. He observed that there were some small new countries which were reaching some prominence in the UN by achieving positions of one sort or another, and he became a vice president of the UN, no small feat.

Q: I suppose they leave their people at posts a lot longer than we do.

OLMSTED: Yes, yes. Sometimes they do, not always. He stayed for quite a while.

Another problem that affected the relations between Papua New Guinea and the United States quite seriously came about just at the time of independence. That was the problem of the secessionist movement on Bougainville Island. Bougainville is the most easterly of all the islands out from the main island. It's the furthest away from Port Moresby of any of them. The people there generally have a darker skin than most Papua New Guineans. The Bougainvilleans generally call other Papua New Guineans, Redskins. They felt that they were different, and they felt that they had been neglected because they were the furthest away.

Then in the 1960s it was discovered that there was an important copper deposit on Bougainville, and the firm of Bechtel was called in to develop it, although the mine was owned and managed by a multinational subsidiary of ConRioTinto Zinc, a Spanish firm. It was the Australian subsidiary of that Spanish firm that actually managed the mine.

A good many difficulties came about in the construction of the mine, because it was necessary to obtain land where the copper deposit was found. Land is clan-owned and very, very deeply cherished, and it was extremely difficult to persuade people to give up their land. Further, damage done to the environment when the tailings of the copper ore were washed down. It destroyed fishing, and there was destruction of some good agricultural land. There were very strong feelings about that.

Well, when Papua New Guinea reached the point of becoming independent, Bougainville started talking about becoming independent from Papua New Guinea. There were three leaders of this movement. One of them was a Catholic priest. One of them had been a Catholic priest, but left the priesthood in order to marry an American woman who had been a nun. The third had at one point studied to become a priest, but had not ever entered the priesthood.

Q: Were these all Papua New Guineans?

OLMSTED: All Papua New Guineans. Bougainville was very strongly Catholic—the other churches were not important there—and the Catholic bishop was an American citizen. Other Americans were also in the church hierarchy as missionaries. Consequently, there was a certain involvement of Americans in the secessionist movement right from the start. I don't think the church ever officially sanctioned the secessionist movement, but it was known that there were considerable sympathies among many of the people in the Catholic Church for the secessionist movement.

Well, the central government became increasingly perturbed over the American role in the secessionist movement. It was very important to the central government that Bougainville should not secede. The psychological impact of secession would lead other parts of the country to want to secede. And in addition to that, the royalties being paid to the central government from the copper mine were a very important part of the national income, of the government's income.

Q: This Catholic bishop that you're speaking of, he was an American citizen, but he was a Papua New Guinean?

OLMSTED: No, he was an American citizen who was there as a missionary.

Q: I see. He was a missionary. But he let it be known, directly or indirectly. . .

OLMSTED: Yes. I'm not sure he ever came out officially, but it was believed that he and other American missionaries in Bougainville were very sympathetic toward the cause.

Q: They felt the United States was actually intervening to stir up trouble?

OLMSTED: The central government was very suspicious of that. They feared there was CIA intervention. I kept telling them that there was not, but the rumors went on and on. I

was at a government reception one evening and one of the senior Australians came over and told me that there had been a cabinet meeting that day at which the CIA's role in the Bougainville secessionist movement had been discussed. It was extremely hard to prove a negative. I saw the prime minister, who was, I thought, very cool towards me, and I said, “I've got to do something about this.” So I went over and talked to him.

I pointed out to the prime minister that there was very little American interest, just a minuscule American financial interest in the Bougainville copper mine. I said, “We have just no reason to want to support the secessionist movement.” Of course, they were concerned over the fact that some of the secessionist leaders were going to the United States to get sympathy at the UN. The day after I saw the prime minister at the reception, I called on the foreign minister and discussed the matter considerably further with him. I explained to him that it would be extremely difficult for us to refuse to issue visas particularly to the secessionist leader who was married to an American citizen. I explained that under our laws and regulations, it's almost impossible to refuse to issue a visa to the spouse of an American citizen. So I said, “We'll have to go ahead and do it, but we will keep you informed.” Therefore, after that, I always let them know if we had issued a visa to any of the secessionists, and I think they appreciated that. But there were all kinds of wild rumors about the Eighth Fleet being just over the horizon with 30,000 men on it, ready to take over Bougainville. Just incredible rumors going around.

Q: As you say, how do you fight a negative?

OLMSTED: Yes, yes. I was very particular that CIA people should not visit Papua New Guinea. Some of them wanted to, and I had rather strained relations with our embassy in Canberra because I just said, “We can't have it.”

Another thing that happened about that same time, two warrant officers from the Army were going to the Solomon Islands in connection with a longstanding scientific project, but we received no notice of their arrival. One of my young officers happened to be having

a drink at a bar and fell into conversation and discovered these two American military men were going to go to the Solomon Islands, stopping overnight in Bougainville on their way, and carrying all kinds of strange boxes and parcels in connection with their scientific mission.

So I said, “Get those men down to my office now.” He did so, and they came in, and they were very reasonable young fellows just doing their job, not at all aware that there was any problem connected with this. I said that they would just have to stay in Port Moresby a few days longer and take a direct flight to the Solomon Islands, do their business there, and take a direct flight out, and not stop in Bougainville.

Q: Lucky you found out.

OLMSTED: It certainly was, because it would have been terribly hard to explain.

Q: Yes, because they would be certain that you knew all the time.

OLMSTED: Yes, yes. So as time passed the Bougainville issue was settled and Bougainville stayed as part of Papua New Guinea and the secessionist movement died down and everything blew over. But it was a very uncomfortable period.

Q: It must have been. Was this an ongoing thing when you went out there, or did it come up after you had been there?

OLMSTED: It came up after I arrived there, because it was at the time that Papua New Guinea decided to press for independence. That was the time that the Bougainvilleans decided that they wanted to be independent of Papua New Guinea.

The next big policy issue I faced came a couple of years later, and that was the question of fisheries. There are rich tuna fishing areas in the Pacific around Papua New Guinea, the Solomons, and other islands. Fishing had become more difficult off South America and Central America for the American tuna fleet. As you may remember, some of our tuna

vessels were seized, and there were difficulties of one sort or another. I think there was probably some overfishing there too. The American tuna fleet started to come into the South Pacific waters looking for better fishing. This posed a very considerable problem. We have some very punitive legislation on the books in the form of the Magnuson Act, which provides that if an American vessel is seized, the United States shall forbid the importation of fish or fish products from that country. I don't remember the full details of the Magnuson Act now, but it posed a great big problem for us. The Pacific island countries wanted to get together to establish a fisheries unit which could police their waters and keep out the American tuna boats and other tuna boats. They had a big problem with the Taiwanese people who were coming in and fishing in their waters, too. This was further complicated by the fact that Papua New Guinea, like some of the other island countries, had established a 200-mile limit, which the United States didn't recognize. This problem affected both Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands and continued until I left, and my successors are still struggling with it.

Q: Did Washington give you a free hand?

OLMSTED: No, not at all. In the question of the fisheries, Washington kept us very poorly informed. The people who were running the fisheries problem back in Washington were mostly people without much Foreign Service experience, and they thought they could best handle it by going occasionally to conferences and doing the work with representatives of these little countries at the conferences.

Q: Is this the Maritime Bureau?

OLMSTED: No, this is the OES [Oceans and International Environment and Scientific Affairs]. They wanted to leave the embassies pretty much out of it. Well, as the days passed, it became increasingly clear that this was a dreadful mistake, and it was only late in the game that they began giving us the information that we needed and clueing us in on what was going on. During that time, the opinions of the island countries began to solidify,

and we weren't able to cope with it because we just didn't have the information. I think that was a disastrous mistake insofar as these small countries were concerned.

Q: Obviously you were not given adequate policy guidance by the Department.

OLMSTED: It wasn't only adequate policy guidance; they didn't send us the basic documents we needed. We finally got a copy of the Magnuson Act by sending down to our consulate general in Sydney, which had federal records. It was a very, very short-sighted policy.

Q: While all of these things were going on, did it create enough of a stir back home so that you had any reporters coming through, newspaper reporters?

OLMSTED: We did not have many reporters. No, it did not stir up that sort of problem. At independence there were a few reporters who came out, but it's so far away from the United States that we didn't have many. Once in a while, a writer would come through, more likely a magazine writer than a newspaper writer, doing an article.

Q: When that happened, the person would check in at the embassy?

OLMSTED: At least some of them did, yes.

Q: Were consular matters a problem at your post?

OLMSTED: Not in the way they are at many posts. With 3,000 resident Americans, you might expect a fairly lively consular responsibility, but our Americans were mostly missionaries, most of whom had been in the country for many years, knew their way around, and were not inclined to get into trouble. So we issued visas, we issued passports, we replaced lost passports, we issued certificates of birth, and issued passports to children born there, and that sort of thing. Getting an American out of jail was a pretty rare occasion.

There was one person—I think an anthropologist or a linguist, I can't remember which now, who grew marijuana in her back yard. She was quietly asked to leave, but it was done without big fanfare, and the person involved agreed to go.

Q: Was she growing this to sell?

OLMSTED: No, to smoke and give to her friends. But the government was very eager that drugs should not get started there. They did not have a drug problem and did not want to have one. There were a few little things like that, but not very much.

Q: Visas, I suppose, weren't much of a problem.

OLMSTED: No. Almost no immigration visas. We issued visitors' visas mainly to people who were traveling for the government.

Q: You said you had some leadership grants. What sort of visas would they go on?

OLMSTED: They went on visitors' visas, unless they were government officials, in which case they might get an official visa.

Q: You didn't have student visas?

OLMSTED: Very few.

Q: Talking now about your mission, your people, did everyone get along?

OLMSTED: (Laughter) No, of course not.

Q: Did you have any problem with rivalries among your officers?

OLMSTED: There was a certain amount of rivalry among the young officers who were jockeying for position. A little of that, I think, is a good thing. I think a little tension keeps

them on their toes and keeps them moving. By and large, it wasn't a serious matter. We had some very promising young officers there, and then some who were not so promising.

Q: Did you have any fallout among the wives? Oftentimes when the husbands are upset, the wives will be upset.

OLMSTED: We had a number of single people there, and there were sufficiently few wives that I don't remember problems arising.

Q: How did they occupy their time? With their children, if they had children?

OLMSTED: Yes. Some of them worked.

Q: At the embassy?

OLMSTED: No, no. One of them got a job as sort of an office manager for a firm in Port Moresby, and one of them was offered a job teaching school but became pregnant and didn't take it. Another played golf and spent her time improving her golf game and enjoying life. Another just stayed home and wasn't interested in working.

Q: So you didn't have any problems such as are encountered in other places with alcoholism among wives or staff members?

OLMSTED: No, people managed to stay quite busy in Port Moresby. The secretaries enjoyed Port Moresby very much. They found that they were swept into an active, informal social life, which included a lot of outdoor activities, a lot of boating and swimming. One played squash and another golf, and so on. So they managed to stay quite busy and enjoyed themselves thoroughly.

Q: Did you oversee any marriages between members of your staff?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: How about your administrative section? Were you lucky enough to have good people?

OLMSTED: My first officer, I think, was quite good; he was very quick. He was the advance man who set up the post. He did very well. He was replaced by an officer who was not good, who didn't want to come to the post, disliked it thoroughly, and wanted to get out, was just very antagonistic. He was a real problem. Then he was replaced by someone, again, who did like the post and was happy there.

Q: Were you able to ease that quarrelsome one out of the mission, or did he just stay until his tour was up?

OLMSTED: It was cut short by six months. I might mention we had a rather surprising variety of foreign wives. One was of Dutch origin, another was Lao, and another was a Moroccan.

Q: How interesting! You said you did not have any AID, is that correct?

OLMSTED: That's right. There was one AID representative in Fiji, who covered the South Pacific, and we'd have visits from him. We did not have a direct AID program. We granted aid to some of the voluntary agencies which, in turn, had small projects, some of which were quite interesting projects. It was very small stuff, though.

Q: The reason that you didn't have AID was because the people themselves didn't want it? It seems as though there would be scope for roads or electricity projects, that sort of thing.

OLMSTED: A decision was made in Washington, at the time the post was opened, that Australia would be the big aid figure and the big figure, generally, in that area, and that we would not compete. Therefore, it was my job to say again and again and again, “No, we are not going to supply aid to Papua New Guinea.” It was rather an interesting situation, rather unusual in the American Foreign Service, to recognize consciously that another country is the big power in a given area, and that we are definitely playing the smaller

role. It did pose some problems for me. On the one hand, I wanted to follow the policy, which I felt was the right one. On the other hand, I did not want to appear to be in the hip pocket of the Australian High Commissioner. I made every effort to keep the Australian High Commissioner informed of things that might come to my attention that he might not know about, but at the same time, I never went from the Foreign Minister's office to the Australian High Commissioner's office on the same trip. I always saw to it that there was some lapse in time.

Q: You have to be constantly on guard, don't you?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Did you have a feeling you were on display? You obviously were a very notable figure in the city, such a small community.

OLMSTED: Well, I was fully aware that everybody in town knew me and that I was a fairly conspicuous figure there.

Q: Did it present any strain to you?

OLMSTED: No. I also knew that there was a very considerable grapevine among the servants and among other groups, too. I knew that my house boy came from a village that was very close to the village that the police commissioner came from, and I knew that my house boy had relatives who worked for the Indonesian ambassador. There were all these little cross-currents that made me warn my staff that they'd better be careful in what they did and where they did it.

Q: How did the Foreign Service inspectors treat your mission?

OLMSTED: We had an inspection about five weeks after we became an embassy, and this was a bit of a strain. After independence, we were all exhausted. Yet we had to get ready for this inspection. The inspectors arrived on schedule and really treated us very

well. They said they thought we were better established than they had expected we would be at that point. They particularly praised us for having hired Papua New Guineans as our local staff. The chief inspector said to me that he was fully prepared to give me a lecture on having hired third-country nationals in my office, and he was very pleased to see all the dark faces when he walked in.

Q: Good! Did they come again?

OLMSTED: Yes, we had another inspection later on. I believe it was five inspectors on the second one, which is a bit much for a staff of seven to cope with.

Q: One on one, practically.

OLMSTED: Yes, it was.

Q: Did you feel they were fair, that their assessments were fair?

OLMSTED: Yes. By and large, yes.

Q: How long did they stay when they came to Papua New Guinea?

OLMSTED: The first group, I think, stayed for a couple of weeks, and the second group, I think, was not there that long.

Q: With five, they wouldn't need to, would they? What would you call your major successes at the post?

OLMSTED: When I left there, I felt considerable satisfaction in believing that the United States Government had made its official presence known and recognized in a way that was entirely acceptable to the Papua New Guineans. I thought that the opening chapter of our relationship had been a good chapter and that I was known and respected and well regarded. I felt that was the most important thing to accomplish, and I felt I had.

Q: Very good. Can you think of any way in which your being a woman helped in your being able to accomplish this so well?

OLMSTED: I don't know as this really answers the question, but not long before I left, one of the people that I dealt with in the government said to me that if I didn't know it, I would be interested in knowing that my appointment there had caused a good deal of discussion within the government of Papua New Guinea. The conclusion that the government people reached was that if a big and important country like the United States was sending women abroad as their representatives, giving them high positions, Papua New Guinea should also have women that it could name to high positions. He said that my appointment there had given a real impetus to the improvement of the position of Papua New Guinean women.

Q: That is important.

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: I suppose up until that time, they just weren't in the government at all, were they, the women?

OLMSTED: Not very much. There were very few. But I think that, as I say, my being there did help get them into the government.

Q: It's a question of education, isn't it? Bit by bit, step by step.

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: I guess that would be the reason why it made things more difficult that you were a woman when you went there, because in that society women stayed home. You must have had to work harder.

OLMSTED: Maybe so. I don't know. I didn't feel that being a woman was a great handicap there. Papua New Guineans are very conservative people and they don't jump to rash conclusions. They don't reach decisions readily. They're willing to sit back and think things over and observe before they come to a conclusion. I think that in my opening months, perhaps even the first year or so, they looked me over very carefully and decided that I was their friend and that they could trust me and that I was all right.

Q: Did you just do this all by instinct, Ambassador, this gradual way that you got them to trust you, by showing your interest in them?

OLMSTED: Oh, I think so. I don't think I thought it over very carefully. I was very interested in the country, so it was not hard for me.

Q: That's the key.

OLMSTED: Yes. It was very genuine.

Q: Did you ever discover why it was decided to send a woman as the first American Ambassador?

OLMSTED: I went there as consul general, and I went there because I wanted to and because I was able to persuade the department to send me. Then I was in Port Moresby when the decision was made that I would be the ambassador, but I'm not familiar with what went into that decision.

Q: But of course, when you went there, it was pretty well known that it was going to become independent?

OLMSTED: Yes, but I had no commitments that I would be the first ambassador. I didn't ask for them and I didn't get them.

Q: You must have been doing a good job. Getting back to the more personal side of things: in the running of your household, you have told me about your staff. How much supervision did you have to give them?

OLMSTED: Quite a bit. There were certain basic things that my house-boy knew how to do, but to present him with something new, with his limited English and his limited understanding, that was quite a problem. For a while, as I may have mentioned, I had a cook, John Veale, who was an excellent cook, and I thought very highly of him in some regards, but quite the reverse in others. He had been a cook in a restaurant or a hotel, and he was really a very good cook, very imaginative in what he prepared. He would decorate a table just beautifully and he'd strew small orchids across the table. He would arrange fruit flowing out of a basket on a side table, so it just looked like a picture. I was very happy with that side of it. But he wasn't dependable. Sometimes he would just disappear, and once in a while I had to go out in the kitchen and do the cooking because he hadn't appeared for a dinner party. And I can tell you that didn't make me very happy. Also he helped himself very liberally to anything in the kitchen or the store-room that he could get his hands on, and my bills went up and up and up. Finally, we reached a parting of the ways.

Q: You handled the accounts, obviously. Your household accounts, you had to keep those accounts yourself?

OLMSTED: Yes, and I did a certain amount of the shopping, as well. Sometimes I'd take the house boy along and we'd do it jointly. Sometimes I'd do it by myself. But I depended a good deal on caterers for my official entertaining, and, of course, that meant that I'd just get the bill.

Q: They had caterers?

OLMSTED: Yes, there were some caterers there, some of them not entirely dependable, but we all used them.

Q: Were they Australians?

OLMSTED: Yes, except there was a good Chinese restaurant there that had a carry-out business, and I could send somebody around to pick up the food from the Chinese restaurant.

Q: Am I right in remembering that your favorite type of entertainment was on your patio? Sunsets?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Sounds lovely. How did you handle little things like your dry-cleaning and your haircuts and that sort of thing?

OLMSTED: There was a dry cleaner there, but nobody wore dry-cleanable clothes in the Tropics.

Q: Who did your laundry?

OLMSTED: My house boy. He ironed quite nicely. He was a little hard on the clothes, but he ironed nicely.

Q: Did you have a washing machine? U.S.-supplied?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Was that post considered unhealthy? You've mentioned this tropical ulcer problem that you had. You don't recall any special problems other than that infection that you yourself had?

OLMSTED: No. I would say all of us, the Americans, were really quite healthy. One of our staff members had a chronic sore throat problem, which continued there. Another had a longstanding skin ailment or skin problem which surfaced again in Papua New Guinea. Skin problems are common.

Q: That's because of the high humidity?

OLMSTED: Yes, and it never freezes, so it doesn't kill off the germs. The wife of one of our staff members had a baby there, and the doctors thought she shouldn't have. Afterwards they said she should have been evacuated to have the child.

Q: What was the local hospital like?

OLMSTED: It was pretty primitive.

Q: Run by missionaries?

OLMSTED: No, it was a government-run hospital. The smaller ones out in the country were, to a considerable extent, missionary-run, but the one in Port Moresby was a government hospital. There were several Australian doctors in town, and there was one Chinese-Australian doctor. There was a small medical school and Papua New Guinean doctors were gradually entering into practice.

Q: Did you have many little children at the post?

OLMSTED: We had four originally, and then with transfers the number increased.

Q: Did you have a first-aid unit at the embassy?

OLMSTED: Yes. We had regular visits from the regional health doctor, and he was able to deal with various problems and give advice.

Q: Did you have any evacuations for medical reasons?

OLMSTED: One.

Q: That was to New Zealand?

OLMSTED: No, to Australia. It wasn't an emergency. She went down under her own power. Had a D & C.

[July 26, 1985 interview begins]

Q: How did you celebrate the Fourth of July, ambassador?

OLMSTED: The post was opened on the 30th of June of 1974. We did not have a Fourth of July party that year, although some people asked us if we were going to. I met that question with a laugh. But the next year we did, and in following years we did. We tried different things. It wasn't always the same. One year we had the Americans and the Australian business community at noon, and then the official community in the late afternoon.

Q: These were receptions?

OLMSTED: Yes, at the residence both times. I found that very tiring, two parties in one day. So I tried to avoid that and have them on different days, but we ordinarily did have one reception that was either primarily or entirely for Americans, and one which was for the official community.

Q: How did you obtain things such as books and periodicals and health supplies and beauty products and so forth? Were they available locally?

OLMSTED: A surprising number of things were available locally, and yet there were gaps in supplies that were also surprising. I can remember one of the young married men on the

staff came back after he had gone out to do some Christmas shopping and reported that there were nine brands of French perfume available in town. Cosmetics were available, not everything, but a lot of things. Medical supplies, the over-the-counter types of drugs, and preparations of one sort or another, usually made in Australia, were fairly freely available, not the newest things, but the standards, I would say.

As for prescription medicine, I think people brought things with them that they specifically needed or perhaps had them sent in. One of my young officers with a fungus skin condition had drugs sent from the United States.

Q: And books and periodicals? Did you have a bookstore back here that supplied you?

OLMSTED: Time magazine, Newsweek were both available on the newsstands, the Australian edition of both of them. There were some other magazines. Psychology Today was available. There were some of the other American periodicals and also a number of Australian periodicals. For the daily paper I read one of the Australian papers in addition to the Post Courier, which was the Papua New Guinean tabloid-size paper.

For books, I myself counted on picking up what I wanted when I was back in the States. I was back every year, so I did buy what I wanted.

Q: You had said that your health was not a problem there. Has it ever been a problem? Have you had any serious illnesses?

OLMSTED: No, no.

Q: Wonderful. Could you describe your energy levels? Are you an energetic person?

OLMSTED: Yes, I think I am. Sometimes I get tired, like anybody else.

Q: But you would say you're a person with energy. How do you feel your presence made a difference in Papua New Guinea? You were a very important one because you were the first.

OLMSTED: I think I was more reassuring to the government of Papua New Guinea on the question of CIA involvement in various matters than some other ambassadors might have been. I think I was more sympathetic to their feeling about it and made more of an effort to reassure them that the CIA was not going to undermine them.

I think that I was able to demonstrate a friendly interest of our large and important power in a small country, and I think they appreciated that. I think that this would not have been as important possibly to others who might have been in my place.

I think the fact that I was a woman did make a difference. As I think I have mentioned earlier, I heard not long before I left that the government had started thinking about women more seriously and their role in public life, because the United States sent a woman ambassador.

Q: Do you think perhaps because you are a woman you were less threatening to these people? After all, you represented a super, super power.

OLMSTED: I think that's possible, because of the fact that I'm not six feet tall, I'm not a domineering personality, and I didn't try to tell them what to do.

Q: Was your successor a woman?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: When you came back to the United States, did you have difficulty decompressing, as it were?

OLMSTED: (Laughter) Oh, not really. I came back and I was still mildly interested in getting another assignment, but nothing worked out. So I made the decision that I would retire, I would not look for a paying job, I would do volunteer work and would perhaps take a little more time to smell the flowers and enjoy life.

Q: Would you have accepted another mission?

OLMSTED: Yes. I looked for a couple, but none was available.

Q: Could you describe your activities since you've been retired? You've not only smelled the flowers, but you've planted them, haven't you?

OLMSTED: I've been active in a number of volunteer undertakings which seem to change from time to time. Just before I retired, I was asked if I would participate in a study which was being undertaken under the auspices of the research arm of the Congresswomen's Caucus on Women in the State Department, and I agreed to do that. Originally I was told that they would want me to work in an advisory capacity, and it would not be a heavy burden on my time. As it turned out, it was a heavy burden on my time and I did a great deal of work and a great deal of drafting on it.

In addition, I was asked to sit on a task force which was being set up under the general auspices of the National Women's Political Caucus to try to ensure that more women would be appointed to high-level offices by the new administration, whatever it might be, that was to come into being after the election of 1979. I agreed to do that, and we had a great many meetings and met with not only our own group, but we met with others. We met with Secretary [Alexander] Haig and met with Secretary [George] Shultz and various other people in the State Department to try to fulfill our mission. I must report, however, that we were very unsuccessful. Perhaps in the long run it did have some impact; I don't know. But initially the Reagan Administration was very resistant to the thought. I shouldn't say “resistant.” It was just uninterested in the idea of having women in high places.

Q: That certainly has carried through, hasn't it? Still today there are only two women ambassadors.

OLMSTED: Yes. Yes, I am encouraged at seeing Roz Ridgway's appointment and Pat Burns' appointment and a few like that. Jane Coon is getting quite a good job in the Department. But I can remember when there were six and seven career women ambassadors, and we have nothing like that now.

Q: Do you think that is because the Department takes its tone from the top, which takes its tone from the White House? And do you think it will change under a more pro-women administration?

OLMSTED: Yes, I do. I think you can see that very clearly with regard to the previous administration.

Q: I just wondered if you thought it was a trend and is going back the other way now, or do you think it's just an aberration because of the Reagan right-wing?

OLMSTED: I think it is probably an aberration. I don't think that women can forever be kept out of policy-making decisions in the diplomatic side.

Q: And yet, you know, reading about women scientists and women in medicine and so forth, they seem to have reached a certain level and then peaked.

OLMSTED: I think that's true. I think you find that women do reach a certain level and then there's a ceiling, but I would hope that it would be a plateau and they would then rise from that at a later time.

As for other things I've been doing, I joined the Woman's National Democratic Club, became active in their International Program Committee. I eventually became chairman of that committee with responsibility for twenty programs a year on international affairs.

I also participated in the formation of an Alumni Association for graduates of the Senior Seminar, and I was elected to the Board of Directors and became treasurer.

In addition, I have taken on the job of being the chairman of the Reunion Gift Committee for my college class' 45th reunion. I am on the Board of Directors of the cooperative apartment complex where I live, and I'm on various committees and subcommittees as a result of that responsibility.

Q: My word, you must be busy with all these things!

OLMSTED: Yes. Some things keep coming along. I took a plot in the community garden and I grow my own vegetables. I bought a dog, which was my retirement present to myself, and the dog, of course, takes a certain amount of my time, as well.

Q: Are you affiliated with any religious group now?

OLMSTED: I attend services at St. John's Episcopal Church in Georgetown. I'm not active in the church, though.

Q: Are you a member of the American Association of University Women?

OLMSTED: No, I'm not.

Q: What about League of Women Voters?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: N-O-W [National Organization of Women]?

OLMSTED: Yes and the National Women's Political Caucus.

Q: Looking back, can you think of anything you wish you had done differently? Anything that stands out?

OLMSTED: (Laughter) Well, nothing that stands out very much. I'm sure there are things that I would have liked to have done differently, but I can't think of them.

Q: You can't think of any particular stage when you could say to yourself, "If I had done this instead of this"?

OLMSTED: No.

Q: Anything you would have done differently as ambassador?

OLMSTED: Not very, no.

Q: What do you think is the future of women in the Service?

OLMSTED: I think very definitely they do have a future in the Service, but I expect it will come rather slowly.

Q: Think we'll ever reach parity?

OLMSTED: I think something roughly resembling parity. There is always the problem of marriage with women in the Service. If they're married to a man who has a job here, what are they going to do? That will, I think, always work against a 50-50 division within the Department of State, but I would expect to see more women steadily promoted to higher levels.

Q: Do you think it's possible to have a career in the Foreign Service, given the very definition of the term—foreign service—and be married?

OLMSTED: Some women are obviously managing it.

Q: True, but very few.

OLMSTED: Yes, very few. I think one has to go into questions: what is the future of marriage? What kind of marriages are you going to see ten, twenty, thirty years hence? Perhaps there will be even greater flexibility than there is now, and perhaps there will be more of these commuter-type marriages. Of course, transportation will make it more possible.

Q: That is true, yes. Can you think of any characteristics women have—we've already discussed some, such as being less threatening—that make women more valuable than men in some situations?

OLMSTED: I think women are more willing to listen.

[Begin Tape 3, Side 6]

OLMSTED: Let me digress to go back to what we were saying.

Q: We were talking about qualifications or characteristics that women have that men don't, and you had mentioned they listen better.

OLMSTED: Yes. That is, perhaps part of the less domineering characteristic that we were talking about. But in dealing with Third World countries, I think that sometimes men, particularly the younger men, go in with the idea that they are to be the big wheel, the big cheese in the country, and try to—well, even throw their weight around a little bit. I think a woman is much less likely to do that.

Q: Do you think the fact that women are more intuitive, also, is helpful?

OLMSTED: Yes, I do.

Q: Do you think that age, as well as gender, is a factor in being able to understand and appreciate other people's culture?

OLMSTED: Yes, and in addition to that, I think that in some cultures age is much more highly respected than it is here in the United States, and that we are wise to send ambassadors who are fairly well along in years to some countries.

Q: So that they will be sort of looked up to as a patriarch or as a wise man, perhaps?

OLMSTED: Yes, but it's just broader than that. A person who has reached a certain age is more respected in some cultures.

Q: So you think it might be well for personnel to take that into consideration when they're sending people to Third World countries?

OLMSTED: Particularly the more senior people.

Q: Yes. Do you happen to know if the Department takes into consideration the personality of the head of state and the personality of the ambassador going there?

OLMSTED: Very rarely.

Q: And yet it seems that could be crucial.

OLMSTED: Yes, but the decision is often made on the basis of who deserves an ambassadorship at this point.

Q: That outweighs needs of the Service?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Have you any advice to give young women who are considering a career in the Foreign Service?

OLMSTED: I think clearly a career in the Foreign Service demands a good deal in the way of fortitude and determination. A young woman should not come in with the idea that it's going to be a lark and that everything will be easy for her, because that won't be the case.

Q: She's going to meet resistance because she is a woman?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Do you think that's lessening at all?

OLMSTED: Yes. I think it probably is. Of course, I have been out now for almost six years, and I'm not really in a position to speak about the current situation. But there are so many more women now at junior levels that I think it almost inevitably has made a difference.

Q: How many personal secretaries did you have during your tenure, as your own secretary?

OLMSTED: As ambassador?

Q: When you were ambassador, yes.

OLMSTED: There were three.

Q: And they were all women?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: I don't know if I asked you if you ever had any women officers at the post?

OLMSTED: Yes, there was a junior rotational officer.

Q: For the record, could you tell me the major honors and awards you have received?

OLMSTED: I received the Herter Award. I think we talked about that, didn't we?

Q: Yes, we did.

OLMSTED: And also the Superior Honor Award.

Q: What is that for?

OLMSTED: When I worked in personnel. In Papua New Guinea, I received the Independence Medal. It was given to people who were in Papua New Guinea at the time of independence. It was not given immediately, but it was given as part of the birthday honors somewhat later.

Q: By the government?

OLMSTED: By the government of Papua New Guinea.

Q: I see. What do you consider the most significant achievements in your life? Of what are you most proud?

OLMSTED: I think being ambassador to Papua New Guinea and having opened the post there, established the American presence.

Q: And your work in the women's movement?

OLMSTED: Yes, I would perhaps put that as number two, my work in the women's movement in the Department of State and elsewhere.

Q: What things are important to you now?

OLMSTED: I think in filling some of the gaps that I did not fill when I was busy with my job and a little greater enjoyment of life, music, art, my dog, my gardening, my friends.

Q: The real basics. I have some questions here that have been suggested to me by other people, specifically Jane Coon is one [Jane Coon - former US ambassador to Bangladesh]. I wondered if you could give me your views on how the women's movement impacted on your career and on your views of yourself. Do you feel it has been a liberating thing for you?

OLMSTED: Yes, I do.

Q: Did you feel repressed when you were a younger woman?

OLMSTED: Yes. Yes, I felt restrained.

Q: You definitely did? I think our generation did. And you felt that all of this sisterhood and this moving ahead has helped you be more of a person?

OLMSTED: A sense of worth, yes.

Q: At the beginning of your career, how much were you affected by the social expectations of sex roles? "Women can only do this," and "Women aren't doctors; women are nurses," that type of thing?

OLMSTED: I think I was affected by them. I think I pretty much—well, I accepted them up to a certain point. Women were not being Foreign Service officers very much when I made my bid, and the constraints were not so great as to keep me from it.

Q: Did you ever have the view that Jane did, that you couldn't conceive of yourself being in a position to give orders to a man? She felt that.

OLMSTED: Yes, I think I did.

Q: Were you ever at a post where sex-connected views impinged on your dress habits, where you simply had to dress a certain way or wear certain clothes or not wear other clothes that you would have liked to have, or were in the habit of wearing?

OLMSTED: I never wore pantsuits to the office, for example, and nobody ever told me I couldn't. Others did, but I never did.

Q: You didn't feel it was appropriate?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: Was there anything that you couldn't do, that you would have liked to do because you were a woman? Any activities in the places you went?

OLMSTED: I think I was considerably more cautious about where I went at night than I would have been if I were a man. I was more cautious about going into bars and restaurants and so on, unless I had an escort. I think that may have been particularly true in Vienna, where I served during the four-power occupation, and where there were Russians, sometimes drunk Russian soldiers, around. I'm sure I was more careful there than I would have been otherwise.

Q: But you never lived in any post where you couldn't go into certain buildings because you were a woman, which happens in the Muslim world all the time.

OLMSTED: I never had a post in a Muslim country. In India, that may have impacted on me once in a while, but I can't remember it as a problem.

Q: Did it irk you?

OLMSTED: Not enough for me to remember now.

Q: Did you ever run into a situation where you had to make sacrifices to take care of relatives or family members that a man wouldn't have had to make?

OLMSTED: Well, in the case of my family, it was my brother who really made the sacrifice.

Q: This is a very individual matter, but did you ever have any problems with loneliness when you were overseas, living as a single person?

OLMSTED: Not very much. I'm fairly self-sufficient, and I usually found I could make friends. There are a lot of things I don't mind doing by myself, and when I wanted to do things with somebody, I could usually find some one but not always. Maybe at the beginning, getting to a new post and not knowing anyone, I think there probably were times when I felt a little lonely.

Q: Did you ever suffer from homesickness?

OLMSTED: No. I think I was homesick for India after I left there more than I ever have been under any other circumstances.

Q: What did you miss about it, particularly?

OLMSTED: Oh, the sights and smells and sounds. (Laughter)

Q: When you were at parties as a more junior person, did men seek your opinions, or were you shunted off with the women?

OLMSTED: I was shunted off with the women to a considerable degree.

Q: Even though you were an officer?

OLMSTED: Well, let me amend that.

Q: Interesting. Jane was, too.

OLMSTED: There was a tendency to shunt me off. On the other hand, I could work my way around it—not always, not always, but sometimes. I think a junior officer tends to be shunted off from the more senior people, anyhow.

Q: True. True.

OLMSTED: Of either sex.

Q: But if you were with people your own age, opposites your own age, male officers, did they listen to what you had to say?

OLMSTED: I think they did. Not always.

Q: Did you find a difference between the way you were treated in the social situation than you were treated in the office?

OLMSTED: Somewhat.

Q: These are the hidebound attitudes that are so hard to overcome.

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: May I ask you a few questions, if you have any opinions on the Foreign Service Act of 1980, and what your feelings are about such things as performance merit pay. Do you think that's a good idea or not?

OLMSTED: I think in theory it's a good idea, but I really don't know how it's worked out in practice.

Q: What do you think about the difficulties of tandem assignments? Do you think this is going to cause a big problem?

OLMSTED: I gather it has already.

Q: And will it continue, or do you think it will be solvable?

OLMSTED: I would expect, as the Department gets more experience, as the ground rules are more clearly laid down, that it should become more manageable.

Q: Do you think they've gone overboard in trying to do that?

OLMSTED: Yes, I understand so. I've not followed it closely myself. From what I hear—and as I say, I'm not following it closely—but from what I hear, I gather the Department has gone all overboard, at least in certain instances, and that they would have been wiser had they laid down guidelines clearly and firmly and then stuck with them.

Q: Have you also understood that there is resentment welling among the single people?

OLMSTED: Well, I heard that seven, eight years, ten years ago.

Q: Even before this?

OLMSTED: Before the present act, yes.

Q: Were they already being given the assignments that were left after the tandems were taken care of?

OLMSTED: That was the fear.

Q: I see. How do you feel about the open assignment policy?

OLMSTED: It has both merit and a lack of merit. I think that it is very pleasing to the individual officers who feel that they have a better chance of getting what they want. However, I think that overlooks the fact that a lot of assignments are locked in before they're announced. It also overlooks the fact that it's turned the Foreign Service into one enormous Bureau of Personnel, and a great deal of time is spent on assignments. The number of cables I signed going from young officers back to their counselors about assignments I found just appalling.

Q: Do you think it's solved the problem or has it just made it worse?

OLMSTED: I don't really know. You see, I left personnel in 1974, and that's eleven years ago. I'm really not in a position to say.

Q: What part do you think the terrible growth of terrorism will have on recruitment in the future?

OLMSTED: I suspect it won't have as much of an impact on recruitment as it will on assignments. I expect that you will find increasing reluctance to go to certain areas of the world, particularly of married men with young children.

Q: Do you think women will hesitate to go?

OLMSTED: I don't know.

Q: Can you think of any women that you know of coming up that we should be watching? Did you know of any women that you worked with, that you thought, “Now, there's a comer”?

OLMSTED: If I sat down and thought about this for a little while, I probably would be able to come up with some names, but there again, I've been out of touch for such a long period of time. It's quite possible some of them have gone sour since that time.

Q: Can you think of any women who have the ability to become as senior as yourself, but who, because of the breaks in assignments or because of personal problems at home, having to take care of relatives and so forth, didn't achieve it?

OLMSTED: Oh, yes.

Q: Any number?

OLMSTED: Certainly a good many. You see an improvement in the level of positions that women are able to get just about every five years, and those who are five years or a little more than that older than I, lost out.

Q: I see.

OLMSTED: Now, Carol Laise, who is just a little older than I am, is an exception to that.

Q: What do you think of the idea of the proliferation of small embassies in Third World countries? Do you think it would have been better to leave them as they were, under some regional office, or make them ministries? We have 140, I think.

OLMSTED: I think we've got about 140. It's at some cost to the United States Government, and in some places there are added considerations of terrorism. I can see the wisdom of either not having or closing small posts at countries that are not very important to us, where there is a terrorist threat. Other than that, I would favor having posts rather than not having them. You can't tell what's going to happen a few years down the road, and you may be very glad about it later that you have a post that's operating and can report back. It might be very helpful to establish at a later period.

Q: And you think that the higher level of post is considered the better in the eyes of the country? That is to say, an embassy rather than a consulate or ministry?

OLMSTED: We haven't had legations in many years. I don't know that anybody is thinking about establishing anything lower than the embassy at the diplomatic level. I think it would be taken as a bit of a slap, at least in some countries, to establish a consular post as the highest level of representation.

Q: Was it worthwhile to open up all those small embassies in small countries?

OLMSTED: I don't see very many drawbacks. It's not much more expensive to have an embassy than it is to have a consular post, and it is more pleasing to many, if not most, of those countries. So I would favor it.

Q: And it has the added advantage of giving more Foreign Service people the opportunity to become ambassador.

OLMSTED: Yes, indeed.

Q: What's your feeling about the UN, the success or failure or worth?

OLMSTED: I think a great deal was expected of it that has not been forthcoming, but I think some of those expectations were quite unrealistic. I think it has served a useful purpose, and I think it will continue to. But as for bringing about world peace and ending strife, that's not in the cards.

Q: What do you think of the impact of the National Security Council, the head of the National Security Council, on the Department of State? I'm thinking specifically of Kissinger. There are those who think that he did the State Department irreparable damage at the time.

OLMSTED: I would agree with that.

Q: Do you think that that having once happened, State can recover and take back its prerogatives?

OLMSTED: I think that has probably happened in the current administration. I think that [Robert] McFarlane has not been nearly as visible, nor nearly as powerful as many of his predecessors, and I think that's the way the President designed it.

Q: Do you think there's any way it can be set up that this won't happen again?

OLMSTED: I think a great deal depends on the personalities involved and on the general guidelines the President will establish. The President will make it clear that he wants the Secretary of State to be his principal advisor.

Q: You were an insider, and maybe you can tell me what damage does it do to morale when something like this happens? Does it affect the efficiency of the Service?

OLMSTED: Yes, I think it does. I think people begin to wonder, “Why am I working so hard if I'm not getting top-level support and if nothing's going to come from my efforts? Why should I be making these efforts? Nothing will come from it.”

Q: Do you feel that there is a place for generalists, as well as specialists, in the Service? And do you see that as the role of the Foreign Service corps, FSOs?

OLMSTED: I've sat through so many debates on this subject.

Q: I'm sure you have.

OLMSTED: I think the whole trend of things very, very broadly is towards specialization, and I think there has to be specialization in the Foreign Service, but I think the specialist who is unable to broaden out from his own specialty, who is too narrowly focused, is the person for whom there will not be much room at the top.

Q: Are there any particularly guidelines you would lay down for a young person's education to help them achieve this broad outlook before they start their careers?

OLMSTED: I don't think what they do initially is as important, perhaps, as what transpires during the service. I think it's very important to take people out of their usual activities and assign them to such courses as the Senior Seminar in the Department. There is resistance to this. I just recently heard that young officers who are being assigned to the mid-career course are complaining over having to be out of the mainstream for that long a period of time. Well, I think it's very important that they should be.

Q: What about the years off for university that they're often giving in mid-career?

OLMSTED: Yes, I think that's good, although many of these are for area specialization, some of which tends to be rather narrowly focused.

Q: The Senior Seminar, you feel, is very worthwhile?

OLMSTED: Yes.

Q: As are the War Colleges?

OLMSTED: Yes. And I think that the Department often overlooks people who are working closely with regulations and law, consular officers and administrative officers. I think the Department overlooks the need for broadening these people and for giving them this kind of training, university training, Senior Seminar and so on.

Q: Do you think that the courses as they are set up at FSI do a good job?

OLMSTED: When was the last time I took a course at FSI? (Laughter) I guess it was about twenty years ago. I really don't know.

We haven't really talked about women in the consular field. I do think that is one of the barriers to the increased role that women will play in the Foreign Service. I think there has been—either a witting or an unwitting—concentration of women in the consular cone and, to a lesser degree, in the administrative cone. I think the opportunities are fewer.

Q: Is this because it is perceived that they will not then reach the level where there is going to be a problem with them later? I mean, if they've never had political work and they've never had economic work, obviously as they go up the ladder there's not going to be any slot for them.

OLMSTED: Yes. I think there is a feeling among some people in the Foreign Service, some men, that if we have to have women, let them do their consular work and housekeeping.

Q: Because they're much less attractive jobs?

OLMSTED: It's sort of “women's work.”

Q: Women's work. Because it's dealing with people?

OLMSTED: Well, it's not dealing with the prime minister.

Q: So in other words, this isn't a positive thing. It isn't that they think, “Women are very good at understanding problems,” and so forth? It's because, “We'll let them do that because I don't want to.”

OLMSTED: Whether that view still prevails, I don't know, but I know that the consular cone has been very heavily staffed by women.

Q: Yes. Getting back to the young women who we hope are going to come into the Service, is there any reason for them to study classics and philosophy?

OLMSTED: I've known some very good Foreign Service officers who came into the Service after a background in philosophy or in the classics, and obviously it's no barrier.

Q: Do you think it would help to broaden perspective?

OLMSTED: It would help to broaden perspective, but on the other hand, when you're looking for a new assignment and they ask you, “What did you major in?” and you say, “philosophy,” it doesn't help to get an assignment as a political officer or consular officer.

Q: Better to say, “history,” and “languages”?

OLMSTED: Or “political science” or “economics.”

Q: Those four?

OLMSTED: I would say political science and economics are the two most desired vocational training fields for Foreign Service officers. Whether they make the best officers or not is something that you can debate about for a long time.

Q: That's a good point. Do you have any reflections you'd like to share as we wind this up?

OLMSTED: I think I've talked myself out pretty well.

Q: You've certainly been very helpful on this.

OLMSTED: I'll be interested in seeing how it all comes out.

Q: I want to thank you very much.

OLMSTED: Thank you.

End of interview